



CHOES

FROM

MIST-LAND

ECHOES FROM MIST-LAND;

OR,

THE NIBELUNGEN LAY

REVEALED TO LOVERS OF ROMANCE AND CHIVALRY.

BY

AUBER FORESTIER.

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TO

RASMUS B. ANDERSON,

of the University of Wisconsin,

AUTHOR OF "NORSE MYTHOLOGY,"

WHOSE GENEROUSLY OFFERED SUGGESTIONS HAVE PROVED SO
HELPFUL IN THE PREPARATION OF THE FOLLOWING
INTRODUCTORY PAGES, THESE ECHOES FROM
MIST-LAND ARE, WITH GRATITUDE
AND ESTEEM, RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED BY

AUBER FORESTIER.



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PREFACE.

“WE find in ancient story wonders many told,” are the opening words of Germany’s national epic poem of the days of chivalry, the Nibelungen Lay: thus indicating from the outset the sources whence are derived the life-like characters, the joyances and high-tides, the weeping and the woe, depicted in its charmed pages, the purport and significance of which it is the ambition of the writer of this volume to reveal to American lovers of romance and chivalry. The class of readers which have been reached by English translations of the venerable lay has been small. The scholar prefers seeking the original, where, having penetrated the outer crusting of the period when it was written, he can best hold communion with its spirit, which, in every true work of art, belongs to all periods. The general reader is apt to be repelled by a literal translation of stories of the olden time, which, however admirable, being but a forced transplanting of past modes of expression, often renders the spirit difficult of access while striving strictly to imitate the letter.

Longing to awaken with loving hand long reverberating echoes from the mystic land of mist, which is the literal significance of the Nibelungen land, to

conjure up for popular ken the champions bold and ladies fair of the old lay, with the motives prompting, the influences surrounding and pervading them, we have retold its tale in simple English prose, in style, so far as possible, adapted to the mode of thought and expression of our day and country; and while holding with strict accuracy to the incidents, and, so far as we ourselves have grasped it, to the spirit of the original, we have simply attempted to follow its language in conversations, and in these only so far as modern prose would admit. The text used has been mainly that of Karl Simrock, who has been occupied with the publication of the *Nibelungen Lay* for upward of half a century.

Great care has been taken to render the explanatory and suggestive remarks correct and comprehensible; but the subject is too rich, varied and many-sided to be exhausted here. The special object of this volume is to interest readers in seeking further acquaintance with its materials in the sources indicated; and if we succeed in this our cherished object, if we become the means of guiding thoughtful minds to the study of the *Nibelungen Lay* in the original, together with all its related myths and sagas, in their various presentations, our labor will not have been in vain.

September 25, 1877.

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INTRODUCTION.

ABOUT the middle of the past century, a certain antiquarian tendency in literature, a fond looking back into the past, began to manifest itself in all nations; in Germany most especially, to be recognized as the re-awakening of national consciousness. Then it was, in the year 1757, that the Swiss professor, Bodmer, published an ancient poetical manuscript under the title of "*Kriemhilden Rache und die Klage*" (Kriemhild's Revenge and the Lament), which had been found in an old monastic library, where it had lain dormant for centuries. This was followed by a vigorous stream of investigations and publications, rolling on with ever increasing current to the present day.

During the years immediately following Bodmer's discovery, other manuscript copies of the same poem were unearthed by other zealous scholars in similar monastic lurking-places, and the one known as the Lassburg MS., considered by many the most authentic original copy, gave to the poem the title by which it was thenceforth known to the world, owing to its termination with the words, "here endeth the Nibelungen Lied." The portion called the Lament was afterward ascertained to be an appendage dating from

a later period than the remainder of the song or lay, and is now usually omitted. Many times translated into modern High German and foreign languages, the work has been criticised and commented upon by such thinkers as Tieck, August Wilhelm Schlegel, the brothers Grimm, Uhland, Von der Hagen, Johannes Müller, and Simrock; and from their writings, as well as from the later productions, upon this and kindred subjects, of Max Müller, Carlyle, R. B. Anderson, Wilhelm Jordan, Raszmann and Wm. Morris, are derived the materials for our explanatory remarks.

Through the researches of these authorities, we learn that the *Nibelungen Lay*, although based on materials more ancient than the history of nations, arose in the form with which we have to deal during that splendid epoch of *belles-lettres* prevailing throughout the Swabian era, from the middle of the twelfth to that of the thirteenth century, when the Hohenstaufens sat on the throne of the German Empire. It was the time of the Crusades, when Germany was filled with religious and martial excitement, and when concerted action with France and the French court of Louis VII had produced so marked an influence on German culture, German thought and literature. The Hohenstaufen emperors opened their courts with brilliant hospitality, and the magnificence of their tournaments and high-tides attracted crowds from vast distances, foremost among them poets and singers. Thus French and German poetry were brought face to face, and French elegance of diction

became blended with the rugged grandeur of German poetic thought and legendary lore.

Carlyle speaks thus of this period: “Then, truly, was the time of singing come; for princes and prelates, emperors and squires, the wise and the simple, men, women and children, all sang and rhymed, or delighted in hearing it done. It was a universal noise of song, as if the Spring of Manhood had arrived, and warblings from every spray,—not, indeed, without infinite twitterings also, which, except their gladness, had no music,—were bidding it welcome.”

And yet this blossoming spring-time of literature, when, as Tieck tells us, believers sang of faith, lovers of love, knights discoursed upon deeds of chivalry, while loving, believing knights were their chief auditors, was not one of pure, unmixed gladness. Carlyle, in his interesting essay on the *Nibelungen Lied*, (*Westminster Review*, 1831,) shows keen appreciation of that tone of sorrow and fateful boding which both he and Max Müller detect breaking, like a suppressed sigh, through the free light and music of the Swabian era.

In describing our lay, Max Müller says:

“There is always a mingling of light and shade—in joy a fear of sorrow, in sorrow a ray of hope, and throughout the whole a silent wondering at this strange world. The key-note of the whole poem of the *Nibelunge*, as it was written down at the end of the twelfth or the beginning of the thirteenth century, is sorrow after joy. This is the fatal spell against

which all the heroes are fighting, and fighting in vain. And as Hagen dashes the chaplain into the waves, in order to belie the prophecy of the mermaids, but the chaplain rises and Hagen plunges headlong into destruction, so Kriemhild is bargaining and playing with the same inevitable fate, cautiously guarding her young heart against the happiness of love, that she may escape the sorrows of a broken heart."

Dr. W. Jordan, in his *Epic Letters*, published in the German *Gartenlaube* for 1874-5, states that the epos, the artistic grouping of traditions into one great poem, can only have growth among a people in the hereditary possession of these, a truly epic people, who, in transmitting their patrimony, have enriched it with the accumulated experience of the ages, yet who had, from time immemorial, one dominant idea about which all others revolve as the central point of union; that the epos can only blossom when this people has attained a crisis in its onward march toward development, and when, at the same time with the victorious elevation outwardly as a nation, there has been attained an enlarged mode of spiritual thought.

Such were unquestionably the conditions of Germany when Dr. Jordan himself gathered together the rich mythical and legendary treasure stores preserved in his own and kindred races, and, harmonizing them with master hand, presented them to the world in his great double epos, the *Nibelunge*, comprising the

Siegfried Saga and Hildebrandt's *Heimkehr*. Believing the spoken or recited word to be to the artist in the music of language what canvas and colors are to the painter, musical instruments and the human voice to the musical composer, he devoted twelve years of his life to traveling as a rhapsodist through Germany and America, and reciting to charmed audiences of German-loving, German-comprehending people, his great poem, which became what it is, the poet says, through the opportunity thus gained of studying effects on thousands of auditors. Those who attended his rhapsodies can never forget the vividness with which, gaining the ear through the music of language, he presented to the imagination the scenes, personages, actions, he has so glowingly portrayed.

But the eyes of the world have recently been directed to Germany's traditions chiefly through Richard Wagner's musical drama, "The Ring of the Nibelunge," first performed at Bayreuth in August, 1876. Its composition, words and music, had largely occupied the attention of its composer since 1847, and through the facilities afforded him by the king of Bavaria he, as well as Jordan, was enabled to test the effect of his work before permanently launching it on its struggle for existence. The history of the great Bayreuth festival, with its splendid scenic and musical effects, is too fresh in the minds of our readers to make it advisable to dwell upon it here. Whatever influence it may be destined to wield in the world of music and dramatic art, "The Ring of the Nibelunge"

must be honored as the culmination of the efforts of a lifetime zealously devoted to rendering available to art, national treasure stores; and if we feel inclined to question its musical promises for the future, clinging more lovingly than ever to the broader, deeper, and more truly spiritual utterances of the beloved master Beethoven, and the other musical gods whom we have delighted to honor, we bow before the clearness with which, in the literary portion of the work, is indicated the promise of the final purifying of the earth, and the removal of the curse brought through greed upon gold, even while admitting that Wagner has succeeded less in harmonizing his subject than other recent workers in the same materials.

What these men have done for a German-speaking public, Wm. Morris, author of "The Earthly Paradise," has done for an English-speaking one in his epos, "Sigurd the Volsung," which bears the noblest testimony that the Teutonic forefathers, the Teutonic myths and sagas, are ours also—by right of our Anglo-Saxon descent. No English poem of the nineteenth century has more closely adhered to the pure Anglo-Saxon tongue than this of Sigurd, in which is retold, with suitable tempering to the modern mode of thought, the tale of the struggles between the Volsungs and Niblungs, as gathered from the Eddas, the Volsunga Saga, the Vilkina Saga, and the Nibelungen Cycle. The metre is an alliterative line of six accents, with foot generally trisyllabic, which in the hands of Morris becomes flexible and extremely musical.

But these great monuments of the nineteenth century, testifying, as they do, to its grasping for freedom, its tendency to combine and appropriate in love, for the good of the whole, the freight of ages, far from rendering worthless the foundation stones on which they are erected, should prove to us the value of these as records of past periods. A grave lack of appreciation of this fact was shown by Jordan, whose poem is even beyond the others human in its interest and in harmony with the spirit of the age, when he strove to cast dishonor, as he did in his *Epic Letters*, on the art form assumed during the Swabian era by the materials on which his *Nibelunge* was based.

For the old *Nibelungen Lay* is also a monument of its day, mirroring, on a background of the inheritance of ages, the hero-saga as regarded under one phase of the thought of a cultured people. As the passions of the times were those of war and conquest, the lay resounds with the clash of arms, visible expression of the mysterious struggles between the forces of good and evil upon which it is founded. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who died May 24, 1872, in the eightieth year of his age, dedicated to the illustration of this work his ripest powers. His *Nibelungen* wall pictures in the king's palace at Munich, inspired by the text of our lay, and delineating its characters in the most vigorous, forcible and faithful manner, will insure it long life, even should the productions of the times tend to cast it into the shade. Wood engravings of these master works, executed under the author's

auspices, are published in Simrock's large sized edition of the lay.

August Raszmann, in his recent contribution to the history of the Niflunga Saga and the Nibelungen Lied, dates the latter, in the form of its development with which we are dealing, at about the year 1200. A zealous priesthood had long since forcibly crushed the pagan myths which were its original germ, but the heroes and heroines connected therewith, gradually intertwined with the lives of well-known historical personages, and modified by the actions of these, lived in the hearts of the people. In songs, largely of a lyric character, they were long sung by wandering singers from land to land, taking the impress of the periods and localities where they sojourned, and were among the first publications after the invention of printing. Many of them still exist in the German Hero-Book. It were no more possible to decide who wrote them than it would be to discover the name of the gifted court poet who, deriving his subjects, thoughts and ideals from the traditions of the people, and uniting with them the manners, language and metre of court life and court poetry, composed our lay. From the large number of manuscript copies found, we may conclude that this was popular among the cultured of its day, especially from 1225 to 1240; but among the people, content as they were with their own popular versions of its contents, it was unknown. Before the invention of printing it was lost sight of, and lay dormant, as we have seen, for three centuries.

Comparative philology, that telescope through which we have been taught to contemplate periods and separate races existing beyond the reach of historic knowledge, proves to us that the Indo-European races came from a common mother-family in Asia—the Aryan, who honored the same gods, were occupied with the same pursuits, who were, in short, a firmly-established people, possessing a high degree of culture. Slowly accumulated treasure stores of customs, religious faith, art, sciences and industries, the basis of all culture, was the inheritance of the Aryans; and as it must be intrusted to the guardianship of the memory alone for preservation, it was well that it came to be transmitted to posterity through more than one family of heirs. Poetic form of speech was the natural result of an effort to assist the memory in retaining the sacred inheritance which came to be protected by a class of singer-priests; and thus the word *epos*, in its original, narrower sense, meant works handed down first in the spoken, later in the written word, sagas and written forms.

Four branches of the Aryan family are especially noted for their epic possessions: the Indian, Persian, Grecian and Teutonic. Of the creations of the first two, as most intimately allied to the last, brief mention is desirable.

THE INDIAN EPOS.

The wanderings of the Aryan family took mainly a westward course. One of the branches, however,

turning first southward, followed the Indus, from which it derived its name; then journeying eastward, made a victorious march through the regions of the Yamuna and the Ganges. The history of its struggles for conquest, blended with the primeval Aryan germ, form the purport of the Indian cycle of epic songs, which attained the dignity of an epos at least twenty-eight centuries ago, two centuries earlier than the Grecian under Homer, although it has only been fully transmitted to posterity in the form it attained eight or nine centuries later, having acquired, through repeated remodelings for political and religious purposes, monstrous and in many respects distorted proportions. Such transformations are instructive witnesses of the value of poetry in the history of nations, proving the epos to be a power in determining the destinies of a people, as well as the faithful mirror thereof.

The epos of India comprises two collections: the Mahabharata, or the Tales of the Great War, and the Ramayana, or the Deeds of Rama. As the Veda, those sacred writings of the Brahmans, which are separated by three thousand years from their latest commentary, and whose title signifies "I know," is the highest authority of the oldest form of Hindoo belief, so these later and more popular books embody the faith of millions of souls who could not sufficiently comprehend the revered Veda to depend upon it for spiritual food. Traces of the original design have, in the course of ages, come to be completely effaced from

the Ramayana, but in spite of every falsification they still remain clearly perceptible in the Mahabharata. This design is exemplified in the destinies and strifes of the Kuru and the Pandu tribes, representatives of the forces of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, and commingled, as before indicated, with historical facts.

The founder of the Kuru tribe was Bhischma, a god of light and goodness, who came from his home in the skies to dwell among men and build up a race of heroes. In now existing versions he is represented as having been under the spell of banishment, although there is every indication that originally he was supposed to have descended to earth of his own free will for the good of humanity. Bhischma is described as having white hair and beard, being clad in white, driving in a silvery-white chariot drawn by white horses, and being altogether as awe-inspiring to behold as a great white mountain. He has a voice of thunder, and, like the German Wodan, or Norse Odin, marking the bravest heroes for his own, he calls them to himself in his cloud-home, with which Valhal corresponds. The great hero of the race is Karna, son of the Sun-god, represented as a foundling committed to the mercy of the waves in a glass-covered chest, in which he floated safely to the spot destined to be his foster-home, as is our Siegfried in some of the sagas. Karna's skin had an outer coating of shell, corresponding with the horned invulnerability acquired by Siegfried, both having one assailable point. As Siegfried for Gunther, Karna wins a bride, amidst

imminent danger, for King Durjozana, the monarch whom he chose to serve; as Siegfried, too, he slays a dragon, the terror of the land, thus gaining mighty treasures; and finally, as Siegfried, he was betrayed by those whom he had befriended and who had professed great friendship in return, being treacherously slain with a shaft sent from behind by Ardschuna, the Hagen of India.

In short, the same relations were held by the Kurus and Pandus which will be seen to have been held by the Volsungs and Niblungs, the former being children of Light, descended from Odin by a mortal mother, the latter, sons of Night and Mist, their hero Hagen being a direct descendant from a gloomy gnome, or spirit of the earth. Could there be clearer indications of the struggles between the powers of light and salvation and those of darkness and destruction? In the course of time, probably when real or supposed descendants of the Pandus had come into power, efforts were made to cast into the shade the lofty origin of the Kuru tribe, and to glorify their opponents. Precisely in the same way, under the influence of a christian priesthood, the divine origin of Siegfried was thrust from view, any savoring of the pagan gods being deemed a taint; and admiration was aroused for Hagen originally, doubtless, because his victim, although innocent and lovely in himself, was a reminder of a hated pagan past. But in neither the Mahabharata nor in the Nibelungen Lay was it possible, while professing to remain true to the main facts, which the

traditions of the people rendered imperative, to wholly cloud the original characteristics of the *dramatis personæ*.

IRAN AND FIRDUSI.

The myths carried by the Aryans to Iran, the land between the Indus and the Tigris, were the foundation of a noble religion, whose believers became one of the most influential nations, but it was not until three thousand years after the commencement of its history that its rich epic cycle flourished into the art epos. Mighty convulsions of nature had made of Iran a land varying in altitude from blooming valleys to snow-capped peaks, and the sharply-marked contrasts between day and night, glowing heat and stinging frosts, fertile soil and desert plain, quickened the spiritual perceptions of man, enabling him fully to realize the force of the struggles between the powers of light and those of darkness. The Aryans in India found life far easier in their new home on the Ganges than in their old one, the inexhaustibly productive power of nature, in its soil and climate, deriding all notion of destruction and contention, soon caused the conception of inimical parties of gods and heroes to fade away; but their cousins in Iran found greater difficulties to contend with in their daily lives than ever before. Here man's very existence was the reward of toil, and he was impelled to prove that hindrances, so long as they be not insurmountable, are really blessings, since the struggle with them is the begetter of power.

In eastern Iran, where, amid incessant conflicts with winter and the desert, first flourished civilized life, there lived, about one thousand years before Christ, a poet-philosopher, who reduced to a poetic-philosophic system the dual religion of nature, and his name was Zarathustra (Zerduscht), or, as more generally known, Zoroaster. Priests of later days contrived to extract from his Zendavesta gloomy doctrines of asceticism, yet its tendency is, in the main, healthy and sound. According to Zoroaster's unfalsified teachings, man was bidden to reverence Nature and Nature's laws, and in rooting out the impurities discernible in the former, to view them as arising through disregard of the latter. The leader of evil spirits was Ahriman, or Agramainyus, the evil-meaning; the chief of good spirits, Ahuramazda (Ormuzd), the lord of great gifts, and him mankind must lovingly and gratefully serve, carefully cherishing his daughter Earth, who smiles upon her children when they tend and water her well, and grows sorrowful when they neglect her. Thus was given to the religion of Iran a practical tendency, and well can it stand the test of "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Then came the building up of the great Persian Empire, with the Iranic people for its center, followed by the conquest of Alexander, later by the Arabians and Islam, and, in the latter part of the tenth century, Mahmud the First, of Gazna, the son of a slave, ascended the throne of Persia, transformed into the mightiest of monarchs. His conquests, in many re-

spects, exceeded those of Alexander the Great, and, like this monarch, he found delight in poetry, viewing it as a power no less effective in controlling an empire than the sword and skill of the army commander. He gathered about him many poets, having them appear for his habitual evening entertainment as rhapsodists before his assembled court, and thus he succeeded in collecting the accumulated stores of the legendary lore of the land and having these combined into one artistic whole. For this purpose he appointed the poet Abul Kasim Mansur, whose song of Rustem and Isfendiar so charmed the shah that he crowned him with the name Firdusi, the One from Paradise.

In the seventy-first year of his age, after a labor of half a century, Firdusi completed his great work, called the Schahnameh, or Book of Kings. The shah had engaged to pay him a gold piece for every couplet, and his poem numbered sixty thousand of these, being more than quadruple the size of the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" combined. The poet had imprudently delayed collecting his fee until his task was completed, and then the shah, alarmed at its proportions, ordered reduction to be made in the payment; whereupon the secretary presumed to make still further reductions. Firdusi was in the bath when the paltry fraction of his dues was brought to him, and he scornfully divided it between his bath attendant and a man from whom he had just had a glass of beer. Fleeing then to Bagdad, he wrote and spread broadcast a lampoon, denouncing the shah for giving only the price of

one glass of beer for a work which, having newly animated the Persian Empire, should have been rewarded by a share of the throne. Although at first furiously incensed, Mahmud finally concluded that he could afford to magnanimously repent of his own meanness; but the resolution came too late. When the princely bearers of the delayed fee reached the gates of Tus, the native city of Firdusi, where he had taken refuge in his old age, they met the humble funeral procession of the poet. The daughter of the latter, no less proud than her father, scorned to receive the money, and it was appropriated to the building of an aqueduct, a purpose to which Firdusi had originally meant to apply the proceeds of his labor.

The Schahnameh would be a much greater work were it shorter. It bears unmistakable evidence of its origin, and yet, through his lofty contemplation of his subject, Firdusi has produced a great epos, clothed in most musical verse and splendid imagery of style, and having for its supporting and connecting pillar the conflict between the powers of light and those of darkness. The heroes of Iran are the champions and the favorites of the good gods, while the Turanians are those of Ahriman and his evil spirits. Here again we have the contending forces, as in the epic cycles of the Indic and of the Teutonic races; but those of the Persians bear the closest relationship to the latter, since, according to the testimony of comparative philology, their ancestors descended together from those Asiatic highlands, where the indefatigable Jacob

Grimm has traced the Teutonic forefathers. Unquestionably there was a common prototype, for Siegfried and the Persian, Isfendiar, who could only be wounded by a branch of the destiny-elm, as Balder the good, made man in our hero, could only be slain by a mistletoe branch. Numerous are the other points of resemblance, and in the materials collected by Firdusi we may greet the oldest existing monument of the primeval days of the Teutonic race.

THE MYTHS OF OUR FOREFATHERS.

The myths which our forefathers (for ours, it must be remembered, they were,) bore with them from the home we have indicated, took root on the new soil where they were implanted, forming a center about which all the impressions and experiences of after life radiated. The branch of the Indo-European family which spread through Germany built up for itself a noble system of mythology, reflecting its religious, moral, intellectual and social development. Tacitus tells us of the might of the sense of honor displayed by the German, of the esteem in which he held woman, and the sacredness of the marriage tie; he speaks of the nobility with which he exercised the rites of hospitality, and of the primitive songs commemorating the reverence accorded by him to his gods, and the noble deeds of his heroes. The German, indeed, in his simplicity had attained a far higher faith than the sensuous Roman or the superstitious Gaul. He believed in a supreme, almighty God, Allfather, as he

called this divinity, who was to him too sublime to be imaged, or inclosed within temples built by hands, nay, even too lofty to be named. In groves consecrated to the unseen God he poured out the devotion of his heart, thither repairing at stated times. The royal hunting-ground of the Burgundian kings, called Odenwald (Odin's forest), is a reminder of this. When first known to the Romans, the Germans had no priests, nor were they accustomed to offer sacrifices; but later the purity of their religion was tainted by their Celtic neighborhood; later, in some localities, profoundly degraded by Roman dominion.

From the downfall of the Roman Empire, in the fifth century, to the Reformation, in the sixteenth, prevailed the so-called Dark Ages, or thousand-year night; but Uhland speaks truly when he says that this night was star-lit, that constellations arose and set in it, which, beneath the light of our noonday sun, are only visible to those keen, earnest observers who are ever on the alert to detect the divine germ in humanity which is never wholly overclouded. Truth may be long hidden by an obnoxious growth, but it cannot be lost—it is immortal.

Very gradual was the blending of the fresh life of Germanic paganism with the Christianity ingrafted on worn-out Roman culture; and when, in A.D. 800, Charlemagne drove the last heathen Germans, the Saxons, at the point of the bayonet, to the waters of baptism, their fate was sealed to remain long under the influence of a power which carried the people

much farther from the true spirit of Christianity than they had been in their original state. The Romish christian church, which had so marvelously overshadowed the exalted purity of the christian faith, also violently resisted the retention of so much as the memory of the grand, ennobling elements of the old pagan faith. The old home beliefs were taken from the German, his household deities overthrown, his songs and prayers forbidden and might have been utterly lost to human ken but for the mysterious guiding hand which bore them to faithful Iceland, that Patmos of Germanic paganism, as Dr. Wilhelm Jordan calls it, where was recorded the apocalypse of its past.

ICELAND.

Iceland was discovered in the year 861, A.D., and thither from Norway, where had first been carried the early home beliefs, there fled some years later, to escape religious and political oppression, a number of noble, high-minded families, cultured in the highest ideal of the Teutonic faith, their souls overflowing with love of the true and the beautiful, and bearing with them the language, manners, morals, art, religion, love of freedom and independence, together with all the freedom, of prosperous Norway. It was, indeed, fortunate that such a people found an asylum like Iceland, where, undisturbed by artificial influences, its powers might grow and develop, where its energies might not be directed into tendencies it would not of itself have chosen, and where, as the spirit matured,

new developments of old ideals arose, new songs were built on the foundations of old memories. All the noble Teutonic characteristics were purified, strengthened, by the stern, inexorable character of northern nature. As the days began to shorten with gigantic strides, the rich light and glory of the summer to pass away, the air to cloud and thicken, the sky to become tempestuous, the roads impassable, the lonely Norseman sat in his halls, counting the slow nights and the moons and awaiting deliverance. A people with less vigorous, less indestructible, mental and spiritual powers would have been crushed into hopeless stupidity, but the Norseman preserved his heaven-soaring, Titanic nature, viewing his surroundings as conditions in conformity with the laws of the gods whom he honored and gladly obeyed, and in loving communion with whom he found compensation for the sufferings imposed on humanity.

Thus myths which may originally have had reference only to wonderful physical laws became invested with spiritual significance and that yearning for deliverance evoked by the long bondage of winter, awakened the idea of a kind, tender God of love, light and spring. When, therefore, in the latter part of the tenth or early in the eleventh century, Christianity penetrated Iceland, it found, amid a people prone to contemplate divinity in its highest sublimity, which is the essence of pure religion, a soil well adapted to the reception of those truths which shine triumphant throughout the ages, notwithstanding the gross net-work of false-

hood with which they have, alas! but too often in the world's history been clothed. With the introduction of Christianity and the art of writing came a tendency to gather together the dearly loved songs of antiquity, which had hitherto been told from mouth to mouth or sung by the skalds, or professional singers, who, throughout Icelandic culture, were held in high esteem. The cold, far distant island offering small attractions to foreigners, its priests were chiefly native citizens, instructed in other lands in the new faith and in the art of writing, without having been weaned from the language and traditions of the fatherland, of which they became the fond guardians. Thus the priests were the founders of Norse literature. Latin, the language of the Romish church, and with it the thrall-dom of the pope, never gained firm foothold, and the native tongue has been preserved unimpaired until the present day, the only known tongue which can boast of a thousand years' cultured reign in its native purity.

A wealth of deeply poetic mythical and legendary lore, preserved in writing during these early days of Christianity, has been handed down to posterity, and the recent numerous translations from these have been a great gain to the literature of an English-reading public; how great a gain and how completely they belong to us may be most fully appreciated through the original poem by William Morris, to which reference has already been made. The great literary monuments of Iceland are the Eddas, the Bible of the

North, their title by some supposed to correspond with the Indian Veda (Norse *vide*, to know, as saga means to tell); the combined Niflunga and Thidreks, or Vilkina Saga, being a collection of traditions from the saga-lore of Saxony, written about the year 1240, from the testimony of merchants from Soest (supposed to be in Saxony), Bremen and Munster, as is expressly stated by the author; and the Volsunga Saga, dating somewhat later, and containing the complete history, derived from the oldest traditions, of the Volsung race and heroes, much of which is also preserved in the Elder Edda. There are two Eddas, the Elder or poetical, long known as the work of Sæmund the Wise, who has been located 1056–1133, although the recent investigations of Icelandic scholars have rendered it probable that this did not receive its wholly perfected form until the middle of the thirteenth century; and the Younger or prose Edda, attributed to Snorre Sturleson (1178–1241), author of the famous Heimskringla, the great Norse historical work, and being a recapitulation and exponent of the first named. The Elder Edda received its name from Bischof Brynjulf Sveinsson, who found it in the year 1643, it having been lost sight of since 1300, owing to periods of physical and political reigns of terror, proceeding from convulsions of nature and invasions of the Danes and Norwegians; and he wrote upon the manuscript the words, “Edda Sæmundar hins froda,” interpreted “Ancestress Tales of Sæmund the Wise.” Now, in the Icelandic tongue Sæmund means sowing

or seed scattering mouth, and Dr. Wilhelm Jordan thinks that instead of a name it was probably a title given to some celebrated learned singer, as was the case with Firdusi.

NORSE MYTHOLOGY.

A clearly-defined picture of the grand mythology recorded in the Elder Edda, and mainly preserved therein, the only thorough presentation of the subject in our language, together with admirable descriptions and interpretations of the fascinating Norse legends, may be found in the valuable work on Norse Mythology by Rasmus B. Anderson, professor of the Scandinavian tongues at the University of Wisconsin. We would heartily recommend this work to all appreciative souls who would truly enjoy gaining a clear insight into the exalted religion of the Norsemen, and especially commend it to those readers in whose eyes our presentation of the Nibelungen Lay may have found favor, in order that they may gain a conception of the nature of the materials from which the Siegfried story must have had growth. Thrust from sight as are the old gods in our lay, some acquaintance with them and the early myths are needful to those who would clearly comprehend its significance.

Many writers treat mythology from a purely ethical standpoint, viewing the gods as personifications of man's virtues, vices, emotions, mental and physical faculties; others seek an historical interpretation, asserting, for example, that the Norse deities are veritable

ancestors of the Norsemen; yet others treat them as impersonations of the visible workings of nature. Prof. Anderson believes that they must be treated from a combined spiritual, ethical and physical standpoint; that the historical was the outgrowth of later accidental points of resemblance; that the deities were originally the personifications of the phenomena of the forces of nature, and that the myths concerning them were elaborated in harmony with the moral, intellectual and emotional nature, the inner life of man; that consequently they were conceived in human form, with human attributes and affections. The brief synopsis which follows is based on his authority, his interpretations being the most thoroughly satisfactory and poetical yet presented. But his book must be read by those who want to know all about Odin, Allfather, the all-pervading spirit, the essence of the world, corresponding, in many respects, with what is known of Wuothan, or Wodan, of the Germans, the father of gods and men, who rules in the skies and is father of the slain, because he summons at once to himself all who are slain in battle; about Thor, the son of Odin by Jord, the uninhabited Earth (a union representing Heaven wedded to Earth); Thor, who, with his mighty hammer, Mjolner (the crusher), slew both the frost and mountain giants in the early days of the creation, who is girded with the belt of strength and endowed with all the attributes of strength, courage and truth, who controls the lightning, being god of thunder, and who was probably first suggested by contemplation of the

thunder-storm, as was Odin by the broad, expansive, impenetrable vault of heaven; about Balder, the pure god of light, beauty and deliverance; Balder, the benevolent, whom early christian ministers compared to Christ, who was typical of sunshine, most beautiful of earthly things, and who was son of Odin and Frigg, the latter typifying tender, loving Mother Earth, the cultivated abode of man; about the valkyries, Odin's warrior maidens, and the norns Urd (past), Verdande (present), and Skuld (future), who watch through life over man, spinning, at his birth, the web of his fate, and who are really more powerful than the gods who, being destined to die, are necessarily limited by time, which is eternal; and about all the other fascinating points of this grand and, until recently, little known Norse Mythology.

Odin wore a hat representing the arched vault of heaven, and a blue variegated cloak (the atmosphere, both hat and cloak symbolizing protection), and perched on his shoulders were two ravens, Hugin (reflection) and Munin (memory), whom he sent out every morning early, to fly over the world and bring back tidings of the doings of men. He wore a ring, Draupner, symbol of fertility, bore in his hand a spear, Gungner, symbol of power, and rode an eight-footed courser, fleet as the winds of heaven, whose name was Sleipner, and who, like the winged Pegasus, was enabled to fly from the earth to the abodes of the gods. Sleipner is a prototype of sundry chargers who can bear the hero unharmed through life, and has been called

the courser of the poet's soul. Odin had pawned his eye (the sun) at Mimer's fountain for a draught of wisdom (see "Norse Mythology," page 230), and he also hung nine days on the wind-rocked tree Ygdrasil, the tree of existence, of which the German Christmas tree is actually a reminder, and wounded himself with his spear, consecrating himself to himself; whereby he learned crying all the wonderful mysteries of the Rune Songs, songs of wisdom. This last Anderson beautifully explains as the consecration of the spirit in the struggle for knowledge (see "Norse Mythology," page 260).

In the creation of the world this deity is represented as a trinity in the form of Odin and his brothers, Vile and Ve, the two latter being mere emanations of the being of the first, proceeding from him, representing different phases of his power. Here Odin was the quickening spirit, Vile, the arranging will, and Ve, sacred or vestal flame, the root of the German Weihnacht (Christmas), the holiness which banishes all impurity. In the creation of man the divinity again appears as a trinity, Odin (spirit) investing the first human pair with spiritual life; Hœner (light) illumining the soul with understanding; Loder (fire) giving warmth to the blood and keenness to the senses. Loder, later, appears separately as Loke, the spirit of evil. In following the history of the gods Odin, Hœner and Loke, asas as they are called, as given in the Fafnisbane of the Elder Edda and the Niblungs and Giukungs of the Younger, we learn the origin of the

hoard, which plays so important a part in our lay, although robbed of much of its original significance.

THE HOARD.

The story may be found in Anderson's "Norse Mythology," pp. 375-377, of which the following is a condensed version: Odin, Hœner and Loke, in the course of their wanderings through the world, drew near a cascade, where sat an otter, sleepily devouring a salmon it had caught. Loke killed the otter with a stone, and gloried in his deed, for he had thus captured also the salmon. In the evening, when the gods sought shelter at a farm-house on their way, he carried with him his booty, displaying this to show that they were supplied with provisions. When the owner of the farm, Hreidmar, a necromancer, espied the otter, he cried out that it was his son who had been slain, and, together with his other sons, Fafner and Regin, fell upon the gods, overpowered and bound them. The gods offered to give whatever ransom might be demanded for their lives, and so Hreidmar, having the otter flayed, stipulated that its skin should be both filled and covered with shining gold. Sent by Odin, Loke sped in his magic shoes, the seven-league boots of the fairy tale, to the home of the swarthy elves where tarried the dwarf Andvare (wary, cautious spirit), in the guise of a fish in the water. Seizing him, Loke forced him to yield up the gold he kept hidden within a rock, even wresting from him a ring which the dwarf had striven to retain, since with it he could

have replaced the lost gold. Andvare then pronounced a curse upon the ring, saying that henceforth it should be the bane of him who possessed it. Pleased with this, as was in accordance with his nature, Loke promised to bear the words to him who should possess the ring. When he had returned to the farm-house, and the gold was disposed of according to agreement, Odin strove to retain the ring, which pleased him; but Hreidmar, discovering that there was one uncovered hair near the otter's mouth, declared that unless this were covered the compact would be broken. Therefore the ring was produced, the ransom complete; but when Odin had taken his spear, Loke his shoes, so that they had nothing more to fear, Loke said that the curse of Andvare should be fulfilled, and that both gold and ring should be the bane of their possessors. When the gods had departed, Fafner and Regin demanded their share of the ransom, but their father refusing, Fafner pierced him with a sword while he slept, then disappeared with the treasure, that his brother Regin might have no part therein. Assuming the form of a monstrous dragon, he lay on Gnita (glittering) Heath, guarding the treasure, known henceforth as the hoard, having in his possession the helm of terror.

“From this myth it is,” says Anderson, “that gold is poetically called otter-ransom. And the curse was fulfilled. This curse of ill-gotten gold became the root of a series of mortal calamities, which are related in the latter part of the Elder Edda, in the songs about Sigurd, Fafner’s Bane, or the Slayer of Fafner; about

Brynhild, about Gudrun's Sorrow, Gudrun's Revenge, in the Song of Atle, etc. The curse on the gold, pronounced by Andvare, the dwarf, is the grand moral in these wonderful songs, and never was moral worked out more terribly. Even Shakespeare has no tragedy equal to it." And again: "The ring Andvarenaut (Andvare's gift), as it is called, symbolizes wealth, which increases in the hands of the wary, careful Andvare. But for avarice, that never gets enough, it becomes a destructive curse."

To this may be added that wisdom, spirituality of however elevated a nature, can never exercise supreme control when wandering abroad in company with earthly desire and the spirit of evil. So it is with Odin when in this combination with Hœner and Loke, so it is in human nature, so it is in the forces which surround us, the clashing, ever contending forces of good and evil. And Odin, with his noble attributes, is not the all-overruling deity of the universe; there is far above him another unknown, mysterious power, which shall rule supreme with Balder in the regenerated earth, when Odin shall have gone to meet the Fenris-wolf in Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods, that is, the final conflict of good and evil. Then will the curse be removed from gold, which in its purity, symbolizing innocence, was the plaything of the gods. (For the history of Ragnarok and Regeneration, see "Norse Mythology," pages 413-436.)

Dr. Jordan, in his *Nibelunge*, traces the jewels and precious metals of the hoard to the upper valley of

the Rhine, where they were extracted from the bowels of the earth by the vassals of King Schilbung, whose brother Aldrian, afterward called Niblung (from nebel, mist—Niflheim, the nebulous world), having long striven in vain to despoil him of his possessions, overcame and slew him through the magic power he had gained from a ring he wore. This ring was formed like a serpent with its tail in its mouth, it had ruby eyes, and had been given Niblung in exchange for the promise of his daughter Gotelind's hand, by Gunthwurm, a noble prince in serpent's guise. In dying, Schilbung returned a mortal blow to his brother, hewing off the latter's hand, thus depriving him of ring and power. On his wedding day, Gunthwurm had presented his wife's brothers with costly rings, the sisters with bracelets, all of the Rhine gold, telling them that should each be content with the article given him or her it would prove a blessing, and would otherwise be worse than death. But alas! from the first, each trinket appeared lustreless and worthless to its possessor, while all the rest seemed brilliant and desirable. Hopeless strife ensued, the trinkets having repeatedly exchanged hands, and with the downfall of the father, a flood of mighty waters flooded the castle, on the face of which arose a hideous serpent, who with voice of thunder pronounced upon the foolish malcontents a curse, condemning the men to live thenceforth as fish, the women as mermaidens, in the waters; and thus they are forever seeking their lost treasures which, with the rest of the Rhine gold, were carefully

accumulated by the prudent dwarf Andvare, as we have seen. The ring was given by Sigurd, as Siegfried is called in the Norse version of the tale, to Brynhild (Brunhild), in token of betrothal on awakening her from her long sleep; and this is the ring which our King Gunther's queen wore, and which was the cause of such dire misfortune.

The story of Schilbung and Nibelung, in the lay about to be offered to the reader's contemplation, is undoubtedly derived from this earlier version, and the dwarf Alberich may be recognized as at least of kin to Andvare. Hagen, according to Jordan, is descended directly from Gunthwurm and Gotelind, which accounts for his being called the son of Aldrian, and shows him to have a birthright in the name Niblung, or Nibelungen knight, which was bestowed afterward upon him and his sister's sons, as it had been upon Siegfried, with the possession of the hoard. Siegfried's ancestors, the Volsungs, from whom also, according to Jordan, the Burgundian kings are descended on the father's side, remain, like the gods, unmentioned in our lay. Here, too, the hoard loses its full original import, partly because this too strongly savored of paganism, partly because interest is so largely centered in Kriemhild's revenge for the death of Siegfried, a passion based on her strong fidelity, and indulged in until her once lovely nature becomes transformed into that of a demon. She does not purpose at first the destruction of any but her arch-enemy Hagen, but the spirit of evil, by her set afloat, grows and gains

strength until all are overcome by its power. Kriemhild herself perishes in the great massacre, but not until the hoard, the accursed, which although no longer the main motive power, gives abundant evidence of its mischievous nature, is the cause of her having Gunther, the last remaining brother, beheaded, and herself bringing his head to Hagen. This is the subject of one of Schnorr's most powerful creations. The frenzied queen stands holding the bloody trophy by the hair, her whole moral state depicted with masterly strokes, horror at the result of her own deeds blended with her demon-like fury, and Hagen has fallen backward, overcome by hideous dismay as never he had been or could be by foe in battle. The attitudes and expressions are surpassingly fine, and we thought wistfully of this masterpiece when we saw the tame scene, in which a servant presents the head on a charger, given as illustration in the admirably told, although wretchedly illustrated, synopsis of the *Nibelungen Lay* in a recent number of "*Harper's Monthly*." The Kriemhild of the Edda, Gudrun, endeavors to warn her brothers when greed for gold leads her second husband Atle, who there corresponds with Etzel, to invite them to the mysterious Hunaland, and her terrible revenge is upon Atle. Morris, however, has preferred to use the German version.

BALDER AND THE MISTLETOE.

The divine prototype for Siegfried is unquestionably represented in the story of Balder, the beloved

of all nature, of gods and of men. He was tormented by terrible dreams, indicating that his life was in great peril, which the assembled gods, to whom the dream was communicated, resolved to avert, and his mother, Frigg, extracted a solemn oath from everything that lives and grows upon earth that her bright hero should not be harmed by them. The mistletoe alone, the thorn of winter, growing on trees, not upon the earth, had been forgotten, and put by Loke (the spirit of evil) into the hands of blind Hoder (darkness) caused Balder's death. (For particulars, see "Norse Mythology," pages 280-297.) Of this myth, Max Müller says:

"The idea of a young hero, whether he is called Balder, Siegfried, Sigurd or Achilles, dying in the fullness of youth, a story so frequently told, localized, individualized, was first suggested by the sun dying in all his youthful vigor, either at the end of the day, conquered by the powers of darkness, or at the end of a season, stung by the thorn of winter. Again that fatal spell, by which these sunny heroes must leave their first love, become unfaithful to her or she to them, was borrowed from nature. The fate of these solar heroes was inevitable, and it was their lot to die by the hand or by the unwilling treachery of their nearest friends or relations. The Sun forsakes the Dawn, and dies at the end of the day according to an inexorable fate, and bewailed by the whole of nature. Or the sun is the Sun of Spring, who woos the Earth, and then forsakes his bride and grows cold, and is killed at last by the thorn of winter."

But as completion of the interpretation, R. B. Anderson's testimony must be heard. "It would be resting satisfied with the shell," says he, "to interpret Balder as the mere impersonation of the natural light of heaven. He represents and symbolizes in the profoundest sense the heavenly light of the soul and of the mind, purity, innocence, piety. There can be no doubt that our ancestors combined the ethical with the physical in this myth. All light comes from heaven. The natural light shines into and illuminates the eye, the spiritual shines into and illuminates the heart. Innocence cannot be wounded. Arrogance and jealousy throw their pointed arrows of slander at it, but they fall harmless to the ground. But there is one inclination, one unguarded spot among our other strongly-guarded passions. The mischief-maker knows how to find this, and innocence is pierced."

In his "Sigurd the Volsung," Morris thus likens his hero, who will be readily found to be identical with our Siegfried, to Balder:

"Now Sigurd backeth Greyfell on the first of the morrow morn,
And he rideth fair and softly through the acres of the corn;
The Wrath to his side is girded, but hid are the edges blue,
As he wendeth his ways to the mountains, and rideth the
horse-mead through.

His wide grey eyes are happy, and his voice is sweet and soft,
As amid the mead-lark's singing he casteth song aloft:
Lo, lo, the horse and the rider! So once maybe it was,
When over the Earth unpeopled the youngest God would pass;
But never again meseemeth shall such a sight betide,
Till over a world unrightful new-born shall Balder ride."

FREY AND GERD.

But the complete germ of the Siegfried story is to be found chiefly in the Edda song of För Skirnis (the journey of Skirner). Frey, the god of fertility and spring, who is really one type of the Sun-god, from his lofty abode gazed down upon Jotunheim (the home of the giants), where he beheld the maiden Gerd, whose white arms radiated such brilliancy that air and waters were illumined thereby. Filled with love and tender yearning for this daughter of the giants, who is evidently the earth or the seed within the earth, like Persephone, in the thralldom of winter, Frey sent his messenger, Skirner (the radiant one), into the nether world to woo and release her for him, lending him for the purpose his horse (the Sun-horse) and his sword (the Sun-beam); but Gerd, unmindful of the bright future in store for her, long resisted the promises extended to her of golden harvests and of the ring, symbol of abundance, before she would consent to yield to Frey's love and promise that her union with him should take place in the green grove, that is, springtime. The myth has a double form, its completion being found in another Edda song, in which the god himself, there called Swipdag (hastener of the day) undertakes the journey to arouse from the winter sleep the cold giant nature of the maiden Menglod (the sun-radiant daughter), whom Grimm makes identical with Freyja (the goddess of spring promise, or of love between man and woman), and whom we can readily compare with Gerd. Before the bonds

which enchain the maiden can in either case be broken, Bele (the giant of spring storms, corresponding to the dragon of later development) must be conquered, and Wafurloge (the wall of flickering flames which surrounded the castle) must be penetrated. These flames indicate the funeral pyre, for whoever enters the nether world must scorn the fear of death.

R. B. Anderson, in his account of Frey and Gerd (pages 348-360), very poetically traces the spiritual significance of the myth to love, with all its longings and hopes, interpreting it thus: "As the warmth of the sun develops the seed, love develops the heart; love is the ray of light (Skirner) sent from heaven, which animates and ennobles the clump of earth. Gerd is the maid, who is engaged in earthly affairs, and does not yet realize anything nobler than her everyday cares. Then love calls her; in her breast awakens a new life; wonderful dreams, like gentle breezes, embrace her, and when the dreams grow into consciousness her eyes are opened to a higher sphere of existence." This myth is reflected in the old Norse romance of Fridthjof's Saga, one version of which appeared in the same volume with Anderson's own recently published translation of the fascinating "Viking Tales of the North."

It is an interesting fact, in comparing this myth with the later Siegfried, or Sigurd, Saga, that Frey is said to possess a ship, known as Skidbladner (ship of the universe), which in a favorable breeze glides swiftly to its place of destination, having room on board for

all the gods, with their weapons and war stores, and which, when not required for use, can be folded into the most minute compass, even rendered invisible. Dr. Jordan, in his *Epic Letters*, compares it to the clouds, “*swift sailors of the air*,” and reminds us that both the *Tarnkappe* and the mysterious vessel in which Siegfried fared to the *Nibelungen* land signified, originally, the veiling of mist in which the warm spring air first penetrated the cold regions of the North.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

In the older form of the hero saga of Sigurd, or Siegfried, as contained in the *Edda*, the ride through the flickering flames, “*wavering fire*,” as Morris calls it, is a double one, Sigurd riding once for himself, and once for his friend Gunnar (Gunther), whose form he had assumed, to arouse and win Sigdrifa, called, later, Brynhild, a valkyrie, one of Odin’s war maidens, who, because of disobedience to Allfather’s commands, had been pricked with the sleep-thorn and condemned to cease being a valkyrie and to wed a mortal man. Him only should she wed, however, who had courage to penetrate the flame wall raised up by Odin himself about her castle and awaken the sleeper.

Now, in the myth, as we have seen, the god marries the goddess, for whose sake he conquered giant and fire; and in order that the saga should be a precise mirror of it, the hero should have married the maiden whom he rescued. In fact, this is the case in a later German saga called the “*Horned Siegfried*,”

where the hero delivers the maiden, Kriemhild, from the power of a monstrous and hideous dragon, who, although a great prince in disguise, is hateful to her, bears her home in triumph to her father's mansion and marries her. As we find the materials in the Niflunga and Volsunga saga of the North and the German Nibelungen cycle, as contained in our lay, the rescued maiden is divided into the two secondary forms of Brunhild and Kriemhild. To awaken Brynhild (our Brunhild) for himself was the purport of Sigurd's first ride through the flames; when he undertook the enterprise a second time, for his friend and comrade, it was in view of winning the hand of Kriemhild, or Gudrun, as Gunnar's sister, in the Norse versions, is called. The sundering of the maiden into two forms corresponds with the twofold ride in the myth, and is indicated in our lay, as well as in the Norse form, by the quarrel of the queens which led to the beloved hero's death. In the myth, too, we learn that the radiant one, Frey, fell victim to the powers of darkness. His first fight, that with Bele, the spring giant, had been a successful conquering of the early storm-winds; his second one, in which he falls, was with the storm-winds of approaching winter, which could not be withstood. The eagles of Kriemhild's dream are winter giants, whose wont it was to transform themselves into eagles, while the pure gods were in the habit of assuming the falcon's form. The well-known favorite of German folk-lore, the Sleeping Beauty, is, of course, derived from the story of the flame-surrounded sleeping valkyrie. Ten-

nyson has used it for one of his most charming poems, but the graceful beauty of the latter pales before the rich, glowing imagery of the description of the ride through the “wavering fire” and the awakening of the glorious war maiden, given by both Jordan and Morris.

In our lay, Brunhild sinks into insignificance after the death of Siegfried; in fact, she is never so grand a character as we find her in the Norse versions, where she was definitely shown to have been forsaken by her first awakener (this being merely hinted at in our lay), who had received a draught of forgetfulness from the hand of the mother of the bride whom he weds. Both Jordan and Morris have her reunited with her lover in death, showing how she died upon his funeral pyre, pierced by her own hand with his sword, and among the grandest flights of Jordan’s fancy is his picture of the reconciliation of the parted queens over the body of their slain love, also that of their final purification through the ordeal of direst affliction.

SIGURD.

Sigurd, this Siegfried of the North, is shown to us in the *Volsunga Saga* as the son of King Siegmund, of Frankenland, or Hunaland, and Hiordis, born unto the latter in Denmark (the land of the Helper), where she took refuge after Siegmund was slain. Hunaland was the inheritance of the Vol-sungs, of whose race Siegmund was, and seems to indicate some mysterious, unknown land. It was later

that it came to be blended with the historical land of the Huns, assigned to Etzel, although in many cases it was used to denote Germany. In the land of the Helper, Sigurd is placed under the guidance of the master-smith Regin, who is none other than the brother of the great "gold wallower," as Morris calls Fafner, to whose death the master incites his pupil, forging him for the purpose the sword Gram (the Wrath), from the broken pieces of the sword of Siegmund, Odin's gift. Sigurd decides first to avenge his father's death on Hunding's sons, journeys to their land in a vessel guided by Allfather himself, overcomes and slays them. It is a most singular fact that Morris has overlooked this important point in the story on which his poem is founded. Then Sigurd betakes himself to the Glittering Heath, slays the guardian of the hoard, thus becoming its possessor, eats of the dragon's heart, which enables him to understand the language of birds, swift messengers of thought and far-distant occurrences, and then he sallies forth to the awakening of Brynhild. Sigurd rides the horse Grane (Greyfell), direct descendant of Sleipner, sent to him by Odin. Grane was named for his long mane (*granus* meaning bearded). His hair as well as his mane signify sunbeams, and he is identical with the sun-charger. The sword, too, is like the sword of Frey, and appears in our lay as Balmung; the horse is, unluckily, mentioned by no name, but Siegfried rides a horse of which Schnorr gives a noble representation. Morris, in his splendid picture of the birth of Sigurd, hails

him as Dawn of the Day, and has his name given to him for victory yet to be. Our name Siegfried means, literally, a blending of victory and peace, as Siegmund means the mouth of victory, the victory-wafter. The legend of St. George and the Dragon is an outgrowth of the Siegfried story.

HAGEN AND VOLKER.

Hagen (prickly thorn) is described in the *Vilkina Saga* and the Latin poem *Walther* as having but one eye, the other having been lost in the strife with *Walther*. This idea is different from that pertaining to the eye which was pawned in the *Fountain of Wisdom*; it reminds us of the Cyclops, and originated through Hagen's descent from the powers of darkness, a representative of his prototype being the blind *Hoder*, who with the mistletoe slew *Balder*. Our lay makes no mention of this, as it would be inconsistent with the grandeur to which here the character of Hagen is permitted to rise. As in the character of *Kriemhild* is shown how a hitherto innocent maiden may be transformed into a blood-thirsty monster, so in the character of Hagen is shown how one who remains true to his highest conception of duty (for such was his devotion to his liege lords), even to the extent of taking upon himself the consequences of crime, must inevitably rise to tragic greatness, even to a certain degree of nobility. In his friendship for *Volker* lie the elements of his power; *Volker*, that genuine creation of the Germans, who, as a people, so well

understand the power of music in inspiring to deeds of greatness. Jordan has beautifully portrayed the character of Volker, calling up before the mind's eye of his readers a living king of the violin, tenderly handling his instrument; yet we doubt whether there exists a grander picture than that of Hagen and Volker in our lay, inseparably united, defying death together, smiting the fiend with giant strokes accompanied by music. In the Edda, it is King Gunnar himself who is endowed with musical gifts, and elsewhere we find Horand the Harper. In the Edda, too, it was Gunnar's brother, Guttorm, who slew the bright hero, Guttorm meaning Gunthwurm; the connection with Hagen may readily be traced. Last of all, in the journey to the land of the Huns, given in our lay, Hagen, in ferrying the hosts over to the unknown land, becomes, in some sort, a type of death, and the destruction of the vessel is a constant feature of similar traditions.

HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL.

Thus we have seen that there are two essentially different forms of the Nibelungen Saga: 1, Low or North German, more accurately speaking, Saxon, preserved in the Edda Hero-Songs and in the Old Norse monuments related thereto; and, 2, High or South German, as found in the Nibelungen Lay and the songs upon which it was directly based. Both proceeded originally from one source, each attaining distinct individuality through the impress of the localities through which it was led to wander.

Two occurrences of the fifth century lent their influence to the High German materials. During the year 436-7, the Burgundian king Gundicar, the capital city of whose kingdom was Worms, was overcome and slain, with twenty thousand of his followers, by a division of the Huns under the Roman leader *Aetius*. Also, in the year 453, Attila, king of the Huns, called the Scourge of God, died suddenly on his bridal night with fair Ildiko, the Ostrogoths being shortly thereafter freed from the Hunnish yoke. These events made a deep impression on the people of South Germany, and busy tradition, ever on the alert for poetic justice, attributing Attila's death to his bride, assumed the murderous deed to have been wrought by her to avenge the destruction of the Burgundians, although it was historically untrue that they fell directly through Attila. Then, following its tendency to combine mythic and real personages and facts, tradition blended these new materials with previously existing stores, and thus was created the character of King *Etzel*, who will be seen to play a comparatively tame rôle, merely the fruits of his past deeds of greatness being visible.

It was upward of a century later that legendary lore came to identify the mythic Dietrich with Theodoric the Great, who did not fight his great battle of Verona until 489, thirty-six years after Attila's death. Thenceforth Dietrich of Bern assumed a position of great power in the *Nibelungen* story. The character of Siegfried is, in the main, uninfluenced by history,

although pains have been taken to trace points of resemblance to the Austrasian Siegbert, or Siegobart, who was murdered in the year 575. Siegfried's father, Siegmund, the good old king of the Netherlands, is greatly shorn of the glory which surrounded the Vol-sung hero whose name he bears, and yet, as is the case with King Etzel, we find in his character traces of former greatness.

The names Gibica and Gislaher, corresponding with Gibich and Giselher, stand in Burgundian chronicles in close relationship with Gundicar, or Gundaher. In our lay, Dankrat (in older songs known as father to their father Gibich) is spoken of as father to the kings, and the mother of the latter, having bequeathed her original name, Grimhild, or Kriemhild, to her daughter Gudrun, receives the revered ancestress name of celebrated tribes Ute, called also Uota, or, as given by Jordan, Guta.

Worms is a city of unknown antiquity, and derives its name from the dragon or worm (*Lintwurm*) which Siegfried slew, the figure of which formed the ancient city arms, as did that of the *fidele* the arms of the house of Alzey. In times past, there was shown at Worms many a memorial of Siegfried; among other things, in the cathedral, a lance or spear of some eighty feet in length, known as Siegfried's spear, and a gigantic statue of the hero; also a grave, purporting to be his, was shown in the church of St. Cæcilia. When the emperor Frederick III (1440-1493) visited Worms after his Netherlands campaign, he

undertook to have the mighty hero's bones disinterred, probably in view of proving the truth of the marvelous story then sung throughout Germany, but although he had the ground dug into until water streamed forth, no traces of these became manifest. The Rose Garden, an enchanted spot just outside of Worms, is associated with one of the legends of Siegfried and Kriemhild; and on the Drachenfels (Dragon's Rock) is to this day shown the spot where was supposed to have occurred the fight with the dragon.

Brunhild's home, Isenland, sometimes called Issland, was doubtless the Ysseland of the Middle Ages, the present province of the upper Yssel,—not Iceland, as has been erroneously stated. Jordan makes his heroes sail a few hours westward from the mouth of the Elbe, out into the North Sea, to reach Bralund, the home of his Warrior Queen. It were vain to inquire into the precise locality of the Nibelungen land, so unquestionably the land of mist and obscurity. "Far beyond the firm horizon," says Carlyle, "that wonder-bearing region swims on the infinite waters, at most, discerned as a faint streak, hanging in the blue depths, uncertain whether island or cloud."

CONCLUSION.

Unquestionably all important social and national changes are reflected in the myths of a people, and must be considered, if we would rightly comprehend the development of these. Those of our readers who care to follow the clue we have endeavored to give,

will find opened before them a wide and most interesting field of thought. The mighty problem of the conflict of Good and Evil, first known as a spiritual development of the conflict of Light and Darkness, occupies the world's mind to-day as fully as it did in the old days of Iran, or in the poetic, dreamy days of German and Norse paganism; and the same idea of the final triumph of the Good, blindly groped after and grasped by our forefathers, is brought again into prominence by the light of advanced christian civilization and modern science. It were impossible to believe in the Divine Love, of which we have such manifold evidences in the great heart which surely exists in nature, as each fresh reading of the pages of the latter plainly testifies, without receiving the comforting assurance that all and everything must tend to the eventual good of the whole, and that the Good must prevail in the end.

Lastly, it were well to state that Jordan, Morris and other recent authorities give the names of their characters thus: Krimhild, Sigfrid (Sigurd), Sigmund, Gisler, the Niblungs, etc. This simplified mode of spelling doubtless helps bring the bearers of the names near to us, and makes us realize that they are our own kith and kin, yet, since as we bring them forward they are in the phase illustrated by Schnorr, we have thought it best to retain the spelling usually attached to the engravings from his works.

BOOK I.

FIRST ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD DREAMED A DREAM.

THERE dwelt in the land of the Burgundians, long ages ago, a noble maiden, than whom no other maiden in the world was more beautiful. Kriemhild was her name, and she grew up at the court of Worms on the Rhine, trained to every virtue, under the protection of her royal brothers, Gunther, Gernot and young Giselher, three kings, noble, valiant and rich.

Their father had been a powerful sovereign, and when he died his enormous possessions had reverted to his three sons. Gunther, being the eldest, took precedence in the rule, and sat on King Dankrat's throne. Dame Ute was their mother, a wealthy queen, and gifted, as we shall see, with far-seeing eyes.

Many mighty vassals, all warriors of renown, did homage to their liege lords at the court of Worms. There was Hagen, of Tronje, uncle to the royal brethren; Hagen's brother, Dankwart, the swift, who was chief marshal; their nephew, Ortwin, of Metz, who was lord steward, and Volker, of Alzey. The latter was surnamed the "Fiddler-good," because he

could evoke such marvelous strains from the *fidele*, or viol; but, be it here observed, he could wield his bow, the far-famed sword Fiddlebow, one side of which was a keen-edged sword, equally well in beating strange music on the helmets of his enemies in battle. Besides these there were the Margraves Gere and Eckewart; Rumold, the caterer; Sinold, the cup-bearer, and Hunold, the chamberlain, all champions brave and true. Were effort made to give full tidings of all the courtly honors, widespread power, lofty worth and prowess rare which these noble masters joyously exercised their lives long, this tale would have no end.

One night Kriemhild dreamed that she was caressing a falcon, strong, beautiful and wild, when two eagles, suddenly sweeping down upon it, snatched it from her and tore it to pieces before her eyes. Greater anguish had she never known, and when morning broke she told her dream to her mother, who interpreted it.

“The falcon,” said dame Ute, “is a noble knight, who will one day seek you for his bride. Those eagles are his enemies. May heaven shield him, or he will come to an untimely end!”

Then Kriemhild vehemently protested that she would never marry; that if through love of man such woe must enter her beautiful life, she would guard well against it.

“Nay, forswear not love and marriage so, my child,” the anxious mother said. “If ever you find heartfelt joy in life, it will be through brave champion’s wooing. You will be a fair wife.”

“Ah, speak no more to me of love, dearest

mother mine," the maiden cried. "Love ever bring-
eth sorrow in its train, as I have seen. I shall
avoid both."

Alas, for such a vow! The fair princess, in her
arrogant mood, actually did guard her young heart
against love for "many a lief-long day," but she
must finally yield to destiny. There came a time
when a puissant knight found favor in her eyes.
He was the falcon of her dreams, and her marriage
with him caused full many a mother's son to lose
his life. She believed that no enemies could gain
power over him, and yet she avenged his early death
on her nearest of kin.

SECOND ADVENTURE.

ABOUT SIEGFRIED.

MEANWHILE a noble king's son was growing up to manhood far away in the Netherlands. Siegfried was his name, and he dwelt with his father Siegmund and his mother Siegelind in the stronghold of Santen, on the lower Rhine.

At a very early age Siegfried had given evidence of his strength and courage, and had, while yet in the bloom of his youth, achieved so many marvelous deeds that story and song might be filled with them forever. Indeed, many were the wondrous things connected with his name, regarding which, in the day when our lay arose, as its bard darkly indicates, it were well to guard silence.

The fearless young hero was beloved by young and old, men and women. He had been nurtured with the tenderest care, and had had instilled into his mind by the sages of his father's kingdom all the wisdom and virtue of the day. His superb manly beauty grew with his growth, and his mother Siegelind took pride in having him adorned with costly apparel, ornamented with the rarest devices.

When Siegfried arrived at man's estate, his father Siegmund gave a great festival, to which were invited all the vassals of the land, as well as the nobles of other realms. This festival, or gay high-tide, was held in celebration of young Siegfried's

being invested with the sword of knighthood, and it was graciously proclaimed abroad that all noble lads of Siegfried's age, whose parents desired them to become knights, and who had been educated worthily, might present themselves as candidates for the same honor.

Many wonders might be told of the gaieties which characterized this festival, and certain it is that Siegmund and Siegelind added greatly to their renown by their liberality upon the occasion. The ceremonies were ushered in by the celebration of a solemn mass in the minster, after which the young Netherland prince and four hundred noble youths were dubbed knights. Thereupon followed great rejoicings. A tournament was held in the palace court, viewed by fair ladies from the palace windows; and surely the sight presented by the ambitious youths, vying with one another to bear off the palm of victory in every department of chivalry, must have been an exciting one. The air was rent with cries of triumph, lances flew in every direction, and the ground was strewn with the jewels soft hands had fastened upon princely raiment. Need it be said that Siegfried, our hero, bore himself proudly superior to all others?

Each guest had been presented by the host with a splendidly caparisoned horse and festal garments. Also, for love of her dear son, Queen Siegelind scattered so much gold among the poor of the realm that want was unknown for many a day. Altogether, the guests were splendidly entertained with feastings, minstrelsy, infinite joustings and pastimes, and

they returned to their homes, after the festivities had lasted seven days, laden with costly gifts.

Many who saw our Siegfried upon this occasion longed for the day when this noble champion should rule over the land. Surmising this, worthy old Siegmund proposed to abdicate in his son's favor, but Siegfried refused to hearken unto the generous offer. Nothing could induce him, he said, to ascend the throne so long as his beloved parents lived to do honor thereto.

THIRD ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED JOURNEYED TO WORMS.

ABOUT this time rumors of the peerless beauty and lofty virtue of Kriemhild, the Burgundian maiden, reached the court of the Netherlands. Much, also, was reported of her proud spirit, and the obstinacy with which she rejected all her high-born suitors. The damsels of King Siegmund's court entertained strong hopes that the latter intelligence would serve to nip in the bud the interest their own young hero evinced in the accounts of the lovely foreign princess. In the pride of his heart, however, Siegelind's child believed that he could win the haughty fair one; and, indeed, the wooing of all other suitors proved to be light as air in the balance against his.

Siegfried's closest friends and those who were his liegemen counseled him one day to seek out some noble lady to whom he might dedicate his services as loyal knight, and who would be his fitting mate in wedlock. In reply, bold Siegfried exclaimed:

“Then will I choose Kriemhild, that noble king's daughter, of the Burgundian land. There lives no sovereign upon earth but might feel proud to win so peerless a bride.”

Tidings of this determination soon reached King Siegmund's ears, causing him deep anxiety. Noble Queen Siegelind also heard of it, and grew very sor-

rowful at thought of the dangers to which her dear child would be exposed in seeking to woo Kriemhild, the peerless, as the royal maiden was called. Then Siegfried hastened to assure his parents that he would remain without love of woman forevermore were he not freely permitted to seek his bride as his heart bid.

“Can nothing alter your resolve, my son,” quoth the king, “I will help you all I can. Most glad am I that you look so high. But King Gunther has many mighty vassals. Were there none other than Hagen of Tronje, harm might betide us were you to woo this glorious maid.”

“What harm could befall us, beloved father mine?” cried Siegfried. “Were yon haughty Burgundians to scorn me, my strong arm and my trusty sword should be my champions true. Did I but wish it, I could wrest from King Gunther’s rule land as well as people.”

“I’ll content me your words,” gravely rejoined King Siegmund. “Were such a tale told on the Rhine you never dare ride into King Gunther’s land. Force cannot win the maiden. Yet if warlike be your mood, our friends shall make ready in armed force to ride with you into yon distant land.”

“Such is not my intent,” proudly interposed Siegfried. “Sorely would I grieve to win by force alone so peerless a bride. No, I need no army; on myself alone would I depend. Twelve trusty comrades shall bear me company, and these you must equip as beseemeth my chosen knights, father Siegmund.”

When Queen Siegelind learned that preparations were actually being made for the daring enterprise,

she wept and bemoaned her sorrowful fate, feeling convinced that her beloved son would fall a victim to his ambition. Siegfried sweetly strove to soothe her, imploring her to weep not for will of his, and finally persuaded her to busy herself in directing the preparation of the most sumptuous raiment for himself and his friends. Forthwith the queen called together her women, and day and night they labored without rest until every needful garment was completed.

Then the little handful of warriors donned their knightly garb and made ready for their journey. In their glittering armor, provided by good King Siegmund, with their mighty swords, their solid, sparkling helmets and their broad, beautiful shields, they presented a dazzling aspect. They were mounted, too, upon lordly steeds, richly caparisoned, having gold-red saddles and other trappings of the greatest magnificence.

When time came for leave-taking both king and queen were overwhelmed with grief, but Siegfried tenderly consoled them, assuring them that they need suffer no anxiety on his account. The noblest maidens of the court were assembled to bid farewell to the brave young warriors, and their sorrowful tears made sad many a stout heart. Perhaps these fair damsels were oppressed by a foreboding of the cause they should one day have for lamentation.

For six days that adventurous company pressed forward, and on the seventh morning they rode up the sand on the Rhine banks to Worms. Their presence was kingly, and as they approached the castle, lords of high degree, as well as esquires, hastened out to meet them, courteously offering to take from them

horses and shields, according to the custom of the land. Siegfried, however, declined permitting the horses to be led to the stable, saying that he might possibly only remain for a brief period, nor would he consent to having himself and comrades relieved of their shields. He peremptorily demanded to be shown into the presence of King Gunther, who, he was told, was in the castle hall of state, surrounded by his chosen vassals.

Meanwhile tidings had been borne to the king of the arrival of the knightly strangers, with flashing armor and princely raiment. No one knew who they were; even Gunther, as he gazed down from the castle window, failed to recognize them. Finally some one suggested summoning Hagen, who had traveled through distant lands and was well acquainted with many renowned knights and princes. Gunther heeded the proposition without delay, and when his uncle appeared, eagerly inquired if he recognized the guests. After gazing steadily from the window for some moments Hagen replied:

“From what land soever these knights may have journeyed to the Rhine, they must be princes, or the messengers of princes,—this I know by their splendid horses and their regal bearing and attire. Never have I seen Siegfried, yet yon handsome young warrior, with proud, lordly mien, can be none other than he.”

Then he proceeded to narrate certain events of note in Siegfried’s career. Rumors had recently been bruited throughout the land, he said, of how this daring youth, riding forth in quest of adventures, had entered, by chance, into the Nibelungen land. Old

King Nibelung, the former lord of the land, had left, when he died, a mighty hoard, concealed within a mountain cavern. As Siegfried rode past the mountain side alone, he found Schilbung and Nibelung, the king's sons, seated at the mouth of the cavern, surrounded by more gold and precious stones than an hundred wagons could bear away. With the aid of their vassals they had brought forth the treasure from its dark abode in view of making a division; but the vast proportions of their inheritance so perplexed them that they were unable to arrive at an agreement. Espying Siegfried, they called upon him to settle their dispute, offering him as reward their father's mighty sword Balmung.

Siegfried had done his best to comply, yet all his efforts to satisfy the royal youths were vain. Both had fiery tempers, and they wrangled so violently with each other and with him that Siegfried lost patience. Turning wrathfully upon them he slew them with the sword Balmung, and their body-guard of twelve giants, all of whom had attacked him, he slew also. Then the powerful dwarf, Alberich, determined to avenge the lords whom he had served, rushed with the fury of a wild lion at the dauntless youth. Him Siegfried speedily overcame, wresting from him his Tarnkappe, or magic cloak of darkness, famed for rendering its wearer invisible and endowing him with twelve times his natural strength. Thus did the young hero become master of the hoard and lord of the Nibelungen land, and all the knights of the land must swear allegiance to him. Alberich he made keeper of the hoard, ordering him and his hosts to restore it forthwith to its place in the cavern.

Also, Hagen told how it was known to him that Siegfried had once slain a monstrous dragon, and had bathed in its blood, thus rendering himself invulnerable, often being called Siegfried the Horned, invincible in combat. Therefore the uncle of the kings earnestly advised that the young champion should be well received, maintaining that no light matter could have brought thither this prince of lofty lineage and high renown.

Impressed by this counsel, King Gunther went forward himself, accompanied by his choicest knights, to greet the guest. Saluting Siegfried most reverently, he asked whence he had come and to what cause the honor of the visit was due.

“I have heard it said in my father’s land,” replied Siegfried, “that the bravest, most powerful knights in the world are to be found at your court: therefore am I come. I am a knight myself, and shall one day wear a crown. Now I would prove my right to rule over land and people, and if you be as bold and as brave as I have heard, I challenge you to fight with me. My head and my honor I pledge against your kingdom.”

“Wherefore, I prithee, have we deserved to have the patrimony of our fathers wrested from us through the arrogance of a stranger?” cried astonished Gunther. “Yours were a poor test of chivalry.”

“Let the pledge be the same on either side,” persisted Siegfried. “If you be victor in the strife, you and your heirs shall rule over my land until heirs of mine have power to win it back.”

“It is not our desire,” here interposed Gunther’s brother, Gernot, “to gain new lands with the lives of

our heroes. No, we will not fight with you. It were folly to do so."

Hagen muttered angry words, while his brow grew dark and lowering, and Ortwin restlessly grasped his sword. Gunther and Gernot, however, having taken counsel together, united in assuaging the wrath of both, then proceeded to bid hearty welcome to the presumptuous guest whom they found themselves compelled to admire, and assured him that they, at least, would hold their wrath in reserve until such time as he saw fit to enter into combat with them. Young Giselher, too, assured the hero that so long as he chose to remain peaceably at their court all that they had should be his. Thoughts of the glorious maiden of his choice reminded Siegfried that he had better be content with this reception. So he graciously accepted the proffered hospitality, drank of the royal wine and was at rest.

A splendid banquet was prepared for the guests, sumptuous apartments selected for their accommodation, minstrelsy and festal games ordered for their entertainment. Ere long it was admitted that there were none who could compete with Siegfried, be it in hurling stones, casting the spear, or other feats of skill. The Burgundian knights saw how strong and how dauntless he was, and they loved him. Beautiful women gazed at him from the castle windows, and he found favor in their eyes. Kriemhild, the proud beauty herself, never wearied of watching him, as he moved grandly through the games. His glorious beauty, as well as his unconquerable might, completely won the maiden's wayward heart.

Thus passed an entire year at the Burgundian

court. During this period, such was his chivalrous delicacy, Siegfried had never once hinted at his errand, nor had his eyes rested upon the lady of his love, who was in his thoughts day and night.

FOURTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED FOUGHT WITH THE SAXONS.

THERE arrived one day at Worms some foreign messengers, who were conducted forthwith into the presence of the host of the land. Graciously saluting them, King Gunther said:

“Welcome to my court! Tell me, I pray you, by whom you are sent hither.”

The messengers seemed overcome by the kindly courtesy of the royal reception, but soon sufficiently regained their composure to announce that they came by order of their liege lords Leudeger, king of the Saxons, and Leudegast, king of the Danes. These mighty sovereigns sent tidings that they were about waging war upon King Gunther’s land because of their bitter and, as the messengers stoutly asserted, well-founded hatred. Within twelve weeks they purposed entering the Burgundian realm with their allied forces, unless King Gunther would negotiate with them upon their own terms.

Gunther bid the messengers await his answer until he had conferred with his faithful friends. Sending forthwith for his brother Gernot, Hagen, and several of the best and wisest of his liegemen, he communicated to them the alarming intelligence. Gernot was eager to make immediate preparations for war, having perfect confidence in the ability of the Burgundian forces to overcome any invading army. Hagen, on

his part, deemed it utterly impossible to make ready to withstand such a foe in so short a space of time, and suggested seeking counsel of Siegfried. To this Gunther strenuously objected.

Orders had meanwhile been issued that the messengers should be as handsomely entertained as though they had not come thither with hostile intent; and while they were feasting and enjoying themselves, the lord of the land was darkly brooding over his perplexity. It could not long escape Siegfried's keen observation that something was amiss, and he kindly asked Gunther what troubled him.

"That I cannot tell you," was Gunther's reply. "To long-tried friends alone should be revealed the heart's secret woes."

Siegfried changed color at these words.

"Surely I deserve your trust," he reproachfully exclaimed. "Only tell me your need, and you will find me ready to serve you, as a faithful friend, to the end of my days."

Then Gunther hesitated no longer. Warmly thanking Siegfried for his friendship, he proceeded to disclose to him the doleful tidings brought by the foreign messengers.

"If this be your sole cause of distress," cried Siegfried, "set your mind speedily at rest. Follow my biddings, and you shall win glory and renown. Had your powerful foes an army of thirty thousand men, I could conquer them with one thousand trusty warriors alone."

It was then arranged that Siegfried should sally forth to battle accompanied by his own twelve comrades and a thousand chosen Burgundians, with Hagen,

Gernot, Dankwart, Ortwin and Volker at their head. Gunther must remain at home, so Siegfried maintained. The messengers were forthwith summoned into the royal presence, and Gunther bid them return to their liege lords with tidings that the Burgundians were ready for the reception of any foe who was so unwise as to brave their wrath. Loading them with costly gifts, the good king dismissed the awe-inspired strangers, providing them with a safe escort as far as the confines of the land.

When the messengers reached Denmark they appeared before King Leudegast, and made known to him all that had occurred. The king was furiously incensed at learning how his message had been received, but he was also alarmed to hear that Siegfried of the Netherlands was the guest of his enemies. He took counsel with his brother of Saxony, and between them they raised an army of forty thousand warriors.

The champions of the Rhine meanwhile equipped themselves for their journey, took leave of Gunther, and rode proudly forth through the land of the Hessians toward Saxony, sweeping everything before them as they pressed onward. Fear-defying Volker had been chosen standard-bearer, and a nobler one had never been beheld. When the Saxon confines were reached, Siegfried commended the army to the care of Gernot and Hagen, who had already been appointed marshals, and himself pricked forward alone to view the land. Very shortly he reached a point whence were clearly visible the combined forces of the Saxons and the Danes, and his heart bounded with joy because of their vast numbers, for these

would serve to heighten the glory of the victory he was confident of gaining.

Presently there appeared before our hero a hostile knight who, like himself, had ridden forward to reconnoiter. After a threatening interchange of wrathful glances, each bold warrior spurred onward his horse and made a violent charge upon the other. First they matched their skill in hurling the lance, then they fought with swords. Siegfried was not long in completely overpowering his opponent, severely wounding him three times. Then the stranger knight, finding his splendid coat of mail and his gold-red shield utterly powerless to resist the vigorous blows which he had failed to parry, humbly sued for his life, and proclaimed himself to be Leudegast, King of the Danes.

Thirty Danish warriors, seeing the extremity of their liege lord, had hastened to his rescue; but ere they reached the spot he was a prisoner of war. Valiantly they strove to overcome the vanquisher and set the monarch free, but Siegfried, the invincible, turned and slew them all but one, whom he spared to return with the tidings to the enemy's camp. When King Leudeger learned his brother's fate, he waxed very wrathful, and ordered the entire army to prepare forthwith for battle.

Siegfried, also, after seeing that his royal captive was suitably guarded, gave the word of command for his forces to be led forward, while with his own brave twelve he dashed on in advance. All their old arrogance returned to the Saxons and the Danes when they became aware of the absurd disparity of numbers between their own and the contending

force; but their false hopes were doomed to be ruthlessly dashed to the ground. Siegfried, with his twelve knights and the one thousand Burgundians, fell upon them with unexampled fury; and although swords did their fearful work of destruction on both sides, and lances flew like hail in every direction, it was the larger force that was utterly demoralized.

Throughout the storm of battle, Siegfried had searched incessantly for King Leudeger. After cutting his way three times through the enemy's ranks, the hero at last found him of whom he was in quest, and engaged him in single combat. When Leudeger descried the painted crown upon his opponent's shield, and experienced the might of the sword Balmung, he knew that it was Siegfried with whom he had to contend. Straightway his strength forsook him, and he surrendered.

"Give up the strife, my followers," the monarch cried to those who rallied about him to defend him in his need. "This is King Siegmund's son, the brave, whom here we find. The foul fiend hath sent him hither."

Universal confusion ensued, and wildly bewailing their ignominious defeat, all who could escape fled homeward. The ground was covered with the slain, and a multitude of wounded and prisoners were provided for by Gernot and Hagen. Amid tumultuous rejoicings the victorious army now prepared to return to their own land, unanimously declaring that their unparalleled success was due wholly to Siegfried.

Noble Gernot dispatched heralds in advance of them to bear the glad tidings to Worms. King Gunther came forward himself to receive them, and

noble ladies of the court thronged around, besieging them with questions.

Fair Krienhild tarried in her chamber. Her heart had long belonged to one of the absent warriors, and she shrank from coming forward to inquire about the fate of the army. A messenger was sent to acquaint her with the news, and she received him with trembling eagerness. Not having courage to pronounce Siegfried's name, she sweetly asked how it had fared with her brother Gernot and the rest of her friends; whether any had fallen in battle, and who had fought most bravely.

"There was not a coward in our ranks, most noble king's daughter," the messenger replied; "but the bravest of the brave was the bold stranger from the Netherlands. The valiant deeds of Gernot, Hagen, Dankwart, and every one of King Gunther's vassals combined, were as puffs of wind compared with those wrought by the hand of King Siegmund's child. It was he who overcame the king of the Saxons and the king of the Danes, who are now being led captive to the Rhineland with upward of five hundred of their knights. Besides these, our army conduct hither eighty horse biers of the enemy's wounded, most of whom, as well as the greater part of the slain, fell by bold Siegfried's hand."

Kriemhild's lovely face grew rosy-red with joy as she hearkened unto these tidings, and she gave orders forthwith that costly apparel and much gold should be given to the messenger. Then she graciously dismissed him, and he departed feeling it to be a very pleasant duty to deliver glad tidings to such a wealthy lady.

Soon the Burgundian warriors reached home, having lost but sixty of their number in the strife. They met with a joyful reception, Gunther himself coming forth from the castle to bid them welcome. The good king was even so gracious as to accord a kindly greeting to his captive brother monarchs, who, while he was exchanging salutations with them, assured him that vast sums of gold should be sent to him from their homes if he would only grant them treatment becoming their royal station.

“Great wrong have ye done me,” said King Gunther. “Heaven reward the friends who have stood by me and crowned our arms with fresh glory. Most certainly you shall be treated as honored guests at my court, and as such you shall have perfect freedom if you will but pledge me your word not to depart from my kingdom until our terms of peace be concluded.”

The two kings eagerly gave the pledge required by their generous host, and were then conducted to sumptuous apartments, where their weary limbs soon rested on beds of down. Orders were given that all other prisoners should be treated also in a manner befitting warriors of renown, while skillful physicians were bidden to bestow the same attention upon the enemy’s wounded as upon their own.

King Gunther resolved to celebrate the victory by holding a gay high-tide, or festival of rejoicing; but this, according to Gernot’s advice, was delayed six weeks in order that as many of the wounded as possible might have time to recover. Siegfried at this juncture, unexpectedly, asked leave of the king to return to the Netherlands, but Gunther besought

him urgently to remain. Thinking of the glorious maiden, upon whose beauty as yet his eyes had never rested, the hero did not find it difficult to yield.

FIFTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED FIRST SAW KRIEMHILD.

AS the appointed time drew near, heroes came pouring in from every direction to the Rhine-land, in order to celebrate the gay high-tide. Among the invited guests might be reckoned thirty-two princes and upward of five thousand warriors of renown, with gold-red saddles, dazzling shields and sumptuous apparel. Young Giselher charmed every one by the winning grace of his friendly greeting; nor was his brother, Gernot, slow in paying his share of kindly attentions to the strangers. In fact, the whole land seemed to be in a state of tumultuous rejoicing; and even those who still lay wounded ceased to remember the bitterness of death as they gazed from the windows at the busy doings without.

King Gunther, in view of bringing about a little scheme which had for some time been working in his own mind, carelessly asked his friends to suggest the most probable means of heightening the pleasures of the day. Ortwin promptly exclaimed that the only thing lacking to render the festival perfect was the presence of the ladies and children, and he proposed that the deficiency should be remedied forthwith. The king, who had long surmised the state of Siegfried's heart, joyfully acceded, delighted to have at last an opportunity of introducing his fair sister to the noble knight.

When dame Ute was apprised of the decree which had gone forth, she sought through her presses, in haste, for rich attire and jewels of great price, for love of her child, wherewith to deck many beautiful dames and damsels. It was on a Whitsunday morning, when the brave knights were assembled to begin the festivities, that Kriemhild was seen advancing at her mother's side, with a body-guard of an hundred knights, all sword in hand, and many a noble lady wearing costly raiment.

The lovely one came forward, says our song, as doth the morning-red from troubled clouds. Much care fled from him, who had long borne her in his heart when she stood before him in her beauty. There glittered upon her garments full many precious stars, her lovely face was illumined with a rosy glow, and every man who beheld her must needs confess that he had never seen aught so fair.

As the bright, full moon floats before the stars, shedding its liquid radiance over the clouds, so fair Kriemhild stood first and most glorious among the beauteous dames and damsels. The lofty chamberlains, the puissant knights, pressed forward to gain sight of the peerless maiden. As for bold Siegfried, he was both sorrowful and glad. "How did I ever think of wooing thee?" he queried within himself. "That was a vain dream of mine; yet, must I forever be a stranger, I were better dead." He grew pale and red by turns over these thoughts; and as he stood thus engrossed, the lovely child of Siegenglind looked as though he were limned to parchment by a master's hand, we are told. Every one present unanimously agreed in declaring that a more glorious hero had never been beheld.

“To the hero who hath so nobly aided us in our need, dear brother Gunther,” spake Gernot, at last, “is due the highest mark of honor we can give. Let the brave Siegfried be presented to our sister, who has never yet saluted man, for he merits all the cheer her salutation may afford.”

King Gunther forthwith sent his friends to summon Siegfried, whose joy was boundless. Fair Kriemhild, who had been apprized of what was expected of her, received the hero of the Netherlands with all graciousness, and she blushed deeply as she softly murmured :

“Be welcome, Sir Siegfried, most noble knight and good.”

This greeting revived Siegfried’s courage, and he bowed with courtly reverence as he returned his thanks. With fond stolen glances they viewed each other, but whether Siegfried tenderly pressed the lily-white hand extended to him has never been placed upon record, we are gravely informed, with the additional suggestion that there is every reason to suppose he did.

From this time forth, in those bright May days, these two were constantly seen together. The possibility of so much felicity had never before entered into Siegfried’s mind, and never was knight more devoted to the lady of his love than noble Siegfried to fair Kriemhild. Many envious eyes followed him as he walked along the Rhine banks with the fair one by his side. For twelve days, amid festivities of every kind, he was permitted, by special favor of the court, to be the constant attendant of the glorious princess, and the love of this peerless pair waxed daily.

Finally the allotted period drew to a close. Gunther called his vassals around him, thanked them for the services they had accorded him, and showered upon them gold and costly gifts. The royal captives, Leudegast and Lendeger, both of whom had fully recovered from their wounds, sought an interview with King Gunther, and offered to send him as much gold as five hundred horses could carry immediately upon reaching home if he would permit them to return thither without further delay. Gunther asked Siegfried what he thought about accepting this ransom; but Siegfried advised him not to do so upon any account. It would be far better, he said, to grant the monarchs their freedom on the sole condition of their never again entering Burgundy with hostile intent. The captive monarchs were only too glad to give King Gunther their hands upon this promise. Immediately thereupon they made ready with their men, and set forth for their own land. The other guests also departed one by one, bearing with them the most costly gifts.

When the habitual routine was restored at court, Siegfried began to speak of returning to his father's land. He had begun to fear that he must long sigh in vain for the coy, often capricious, lady of his love. Young Giselher, however, besought him to stay with them yet awhile longer; and Siegfried's heart was touched at this and at the universal expressions of affection for him at court. He remained, and was rewarded by seeing Kriemhild every day.

SIXTH ADVENTURE.

HOW GUNTHER FARED TO ISENLAND TO WOO BRUNHILD.

FRESH tidings now reached the Rhine. It was rumored that there were many fair maidens beyond the Burgundian realm, and one of these King Gunther resolved upon winning for his bride. So haughty was his mood that none other would content him than a noble king's daughter, who ruled far over the sea, the widely-renowned Brunhild, Queen of Isenland. She was beautiful beyond compare, but her dowry of incomparable strength was more marvelous than her beauty. Each aspirant to her hand must match his skill with hers in the three games of casting the spear, hurling the stone, and leaping. The successful competitor she was pledged to marry, all others were condemned to forfeit their heads. Hitherto no one had made the slightest approach to success, and many lives had fallen sacrifice to the dread queen's caprice.

One day when King Gunther sat in counsel with his friends, who had long entreated him to select a spouse worthy alike of himself and of his people, he greatly astounded them by announcing his intention to woo the mighty Brunhild. Siegfried, who evidently had reasons he did not see fit to admit for being well informed about the warrior-queen, proceeded forthwith to depict, in glowing colors, the dangers incident upon such an enterprise; but Gun-

ther coolly replied that he felt himself thoroughly able to compete with a woman, were she ever so strong.

“Hold!” impetuously cried Siegfried. “The power of this woman is unknown to you. Were the strength of four men yours, you could not escape her remorseless fury. As you value your life, friend Gunther, give up this scheme, I beseech you. I mean well with my advice.”

The king was in no mood to hearken unto caution, for his heart was set upon this suit. Ever-prudent Hagen, whom nothing escaped, perceived this, and promptly suggested that since Siegfried was so well informed about Brunhild, it would be well if he could be prevailed upon to accompany the king upon this perilous voyage.

“Most noble Siegfried,” exclaimed Gunther, turning at once to the hero of the Netherlands, “help me to woo this adorable fair one. Grant my request, I implore you, and if the glorious maid is won, I shall be most happy to risk honor, life and limb for you in return.”

“Promise me your sister, fair Kriemhild, for my bride,” was Siegfried’s reply, “and I will joyfully aid you. Other guerdon for toil and pain I do not desire.”

“That will I gladly promise,” cried Gunther. “The day peerless Brunhild enters this land as its queen my sister shall become your wife.”

The brave knights warmly clasped hands upon this compact, whence arose, at the destined time, such boundless misery. Then Gunther inquired whether a force of thirty thousand men would be a sufficient

escort, but Siegfried assured him that an army would be of no avail; that, in fact, their wisest course would be to rely upon themselves, Hagen and Dankwart alone. After this the requisite preparations were discussed, and Siegfried advised that the richest, most sumptuous apparel the land could afford should be ordered to be worn upon this occasion. The king proposed seeking out his mother forthwith, in order to lay the matter before her, but Hagen cried:

“Wherefore trouble your mother? Confer instead with your sister; her taste and skill is great. She will well satisfy our needs.”

Gunther was pleased with this suggestion, and at once sent word to his sister that he and his friend Siegfried desired to hold audience with her. The fair maiden donned her richest attire, nor did she object to the conference.

“Welcome, my brother, and you, his friend,” said she, as the two champions drew near. “Tell me, I beseech you, in what way I can serve you.”

Thereupon King Gunther apprised her of his projected enterprise, and told her that upon her alone did he rely for aid in the preparation of suitable wardrobes. Kriemhild hearkened with lively interest, and cheerfully promised to spare no pains in executing the important commission. No sooner had the warriors bold sallied forth from her presence than she hastened to assemble together thirty of her most skilled maidens in order to begin the work without delay.

With her own white hand Kriemhild cut out garments of snow-white silk from Araby, of good Zazemang, green as clover, of rare skins covered with silks from Morocco and from Lybia. For seven weeks

she employed herself with her maidens in embroidering curious devices, studded with costly jewels, and wrought with threads of gold. At the expiration of this period, twelve suits for each of the four knights were completed.

The time had been employed by the warriors themselves in setting all things in readiness for the journey. Their helmets and clanging armor had to be looked after, their weapons put in order, a strong bark suitably equipped for the voyage, and provisions made for the management of the realm during the absence of the king. Nor had Siegfried forgotten his Tarnkappe, that most invaluable cloak of darkness he had wrested from the dwarf Alberich. Wild dwarfs dwelling in mountain caves, we learn from our song, often possessed such screens as this, which made them proof against any weapon, enabled them to become invisible, and gave them twelve times their natural strength.

When word was brought King Gunther and his friends that Kriemhild's task was completed, and that the handiwork of fair fingers was ready for inspection, they hastened to try on the garments. Every article fitted to perfection, and the warriors were forced to admit that their eyes had never rested upon more dazzling raiment. They demanded audience of Kriemhild, in order to tender her their heartiest thanks, and bid her farewell. When they were ushered into the presence of the lovely maiden they found her bright eyes clouded with weeping.

“Dearest brother mine,” cried she, “it were better for you to remain at home, and woo one among other women. There is many a high-born

maiden nigh at hand. Why cross the seas and risk your precious life?"

She seemed truly oppressed by dire forebodings, and these her maidens doubtless shared, for they wept sorrowfully while she spoke. Finding her brother immovable, she turned to Siegfried and sweetly commended Gunther to his protection. Deeply touched, the brave hero made answer thus to her appeal:

"So long as life endures I will watch over and guard him. Be at rest, noble princess, I will surely bring him back unharmed to the Rhineland."

Kriemhild bowed low in gratitude, but she could speak no word. Then the last farewells were spoken and the heroes went forth from the royal maiden's presence. They rode down to the Rhine banks on the richly-caparisoned steeds, followed by attendants who carried after them the princely robes and gold-red shields. Arrived at the shore, they took leave of the assembled multitude and entered the waiting vessel, taking with them their noble chargers. Kriemhild and her maidens watched them from the casements, and the eyes of many a lovely child were clouded with tears.

"Who will be steersman?" asked Gunther of his companions.

"I will," responded Siegfried, "for well I know our course."

So saying, he seized an oar and pushed the bark off from the strand. The sail was unfurled to the breeze, and the trusty comrades were speedily drifting seaward on the waters of the Rhine. Before set of sun they had reached the open sea. They

had on board rich viands, as well as a goodly store of choicest wines, and they managed to make merry despite the arduous rowing of which each knight took his share.

Upon the twelfth morning the bark came within view of Isenstein, a fortress in the martial Brunhild's land. Siegfried alone recognized the spot; he had been there before, as we learn from other records of his history which detail incidents not noted by our bard. Gunther, however, was attracted by the far-stretching coast and the castles frowning from every height.

"Friend Siegfried," quoth he, "to whom belongs yon fair land? Whose these castles, and the citadel that looms up before us? Never have I seen aught so nobly planned."

"Well do I know what you ask," replied Siegfried. "Brunhild is mistress of all these castles, this fair land, and Isenstein, yon fortress. Many a fair dame will you meet here to-day, Sir Gunther. And now, my friends," continued the hero of the Netherlands, "we must be wary when we stand before Queen Brunhild this day. Tell but this single story at court, that King Gunther is my liege lord, and that we are all his vassals. Believe me, there are ample reasons for this. But think not that I stoop to play this part for love of you alone, Sir Gunther. No; it is because of Kriemhild, who is as my own soul and life."

With one accord the comrades promised to heed Siegfried's bidding, and therein they were wise.

SEVENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW GUNTHER WON BRUNHILD.

AS they drew nearer the citadel, Gunther discovered that many beautiful maidens were watching them from the windows. Eagerly his eye wandered from one proud beauty to another, and finally rested upon the most grandly superb maiden of the number. Noting this, Siegfried cried:

“Scan yon damsels well, friend Gunther, and tell me which one you would take for your own if you had your choice.”

“Ay, that I will,” replied Gunther. “Can the peerless maiden in snow-white raiment at yonder window be won, she shall be my bride.”

“Well indeed have you chosen,” exclaimed Siegfried. “Yon glorious maiden is none other than Brunhild.”

When the heroes landed, Siegfried, in his rôle of vassal, humbly led forward Gunther’s horse, and held the bridle while the king mounted. Never before had this knight of renown performed so menial a service. After getting through with the preliminaries of landing, the friends rode up to the fortress, which was composed of three wide-stretching palaces, with six-and-eighty towers and a broad central hall, the entire edifice being built of purest marble, green as grass. It was a goodly sight to view these champions. Princely was their jewel-studded vesture; rich

stones adorned their saddles; suspended from their *poitrails* were gold bells, which tinkled as they rode; and proudly the comrades moved onward.

Queen Brunhild had noted every movement, and she eagerly questioned her attendants regarding the identity of the stately warriors. One of the maidens replied:

“There is one among these noble champions who hath the princely Siegfried’s bearing; him receive and welcome well, great queen. This I say with faithful intent. The second is perchance some great king. Behold how lordly he appeareth there amid his companions! The third, with garments of raven hue, is stern and awful to behold, yet rarely may be seen a manlier form. His glances are rapid, firm is his courage, I ween, his temper fierce and grim. The fourth seems young and gentle, yet trained withal in every knightly virtue. Many are the tears would be shed should harm befall him, noble queen.”

Straightway the royal Brunhild bid her maidens array her in the costliest of her raiment, and strange reminiscences of a past, only dimly alluded to in our song, must have arisen preëminent in her mind, leading her to suppose, as a matter of course, that Siegfried had come to claim her hand for himself. Orders were given to unbar the castle gates, and Brunhild’s liegemen went forth to meet and do honor to the guests. Hagen remonstrated when he found that swords and glittering armor were to be taken away from himself and comrades, as well as horses and shields, but being informed by Siegfried that such was the custom of the land, he yielded.

Brunhild, surrounded by an hundred maidens,

with an escort of five hundred knights of Isenland, sword in hand, awaited the approach of the warriors in her courtly hall. When they were led into her presence, she turned to Siegfried and thus accosted him :

“ You are welcome, Siegfried, to my kingdom. Fain would I know the import of your visit.”

“ Accept my hearty thanks, Queen Brunhild, for deigning to recognize me in presence of this my liege lord,” replied Siegfried, waving his hand toward Gunther. “ This bold champion is Gunther, king of the Rhine lands, and I am his vassal. He has come hither to woo you, let come what may.”

“ If he be your lord, if you be his liegeman,” cried Brunhild, concealing as best she could her surprise and chagrin, “ and he will try the games, I will be his wife should he prove master. But if I win once, you must all lose your lives.”

“ What are these games, most noble queen?” asked Hagen. “ Strange were it indeed if my lord Gunther should leave the victory to you.”

“ Casting the spear, hurling the stone and leaping after it,” was the cruel fair one’s reply.

Hereupon Siegfried stole softly to the king’s side and bade him talk freely with the queen, bearing in mind that a friend was at hand to aid him. Thus encouraged, Gunther turned to Brunhild and said:

“ Make what conditions you please, most glorious queen, I would accept them all were they far worse than these. Gladly will I lay down my life if I fail to win you.”

Forthwith the royal maiden called for her harness and trappings. She donned a coat of mail which

was impervious to weapon, wrought by skilled Lybian artisans, edged with glittering lace and sparkling all over with jewels. When the ground was cleared, there formed about the scene of action a circle of seven hundred armed men, who stood there as umpires. As the dread maiden took her place, her spear, weighing an hundred pounds, was carried forward by three men, who groaned beneath its weight. Her shield was three spans thick with gold and steel ; it was inlaid with precious stones, and was so weighty that four chamberlains staggered beneath its load. Twelve men were needed to bear the weight of the monstrous stone.

The wily Siegfried had sped secretly to the bark and soon returned enveloped in his Tarnkappe, so that he was wholly concealed from view. Drawing near Gunther, he whispered fresh words of encouragement in the royal ear. These were indeed well timed, for the wooer's heart was beginning to be filled with consternation. Grim Hagen, too, was almost beside himself with angry apprehension for his liege lord, while Dankwart bewailed the day that they had sailed from their native shore.

“Ah !” quoth the latter, “had my brother Hagen and the rest of us our trusty swords, we could teach a lesson to this dread queen and her haughty vassals. They should pay dearly for the rash effort if they called upon our beloved liege to lay down his precious life for a mere maiden's whim.”

“Since such be your mood,” scornfully ejaculated Brunhild, who had overheard these words, and who now cast a contemptuous look over her shoulders as she spoke, “pray send for your trappings; you shall

have your keen-edged swords in your hands. Little matters it to me whether you be defenseless or most potently equipped for combat. Never yet have I had cause to fear strength of mortal man."

Dankwart flushed with pleasure when once more his well-tried sword was within his grasp; and his comrades, too, were filled with a sense of relief at this compliance with their wishes. At the moment when all was in readiness for the trial of skill, Siegfried gently touched Gunther's hand and whispered in his ear:

"It is I, Siegfried, your comrade. Banish all fear. Let me take your shield, and forget not what I tell you. Act you the gestures, and I will do the work."

Brunhild now cast her spear, and with so much violence that sparks scintillated therefrom as it whizzed through the air. It struck the opposing shield with such violence that both Gunther and Siegfried were cast to the ground, although of course only the king's downfall was apparent. The blood gushed from Siegfried's nostrils, and had it not been for the Tarnkappe, sorry would have been the fate of both himself and his friend. As it was, both warriors arose instantly, and while Hagen was muttering his words of ill content, pronouncing the fair and mighty queen to be none other than the foul fiend's bride, Siegfried picked up the spear and hurled it back. As he did not desire to kill his fair opponent, he turned the spear's blunt side; nevertheless the queen was dashed to the ground. Quickly regaining her feet, the fearless maiden cried, taking it for granted that the Burgundian king was acting himself:

“Well done, indeed, Sir Gunther; but do not think me conquered yet. We have still to hurl the stone and to leap.”

Her white arms raising the monstrous stone high in the air, while her eyes flashed fury, she swung it to and fro for several moments with terrific display of strength, and then cast it twelve fathoms, leaping after it with marvelous agility. Accompanied by the invisible Siegfried, Gunther approached the spot where the stone lay, placed his hands upon it and seemed to cast it. In reality it was Siegfried who hurled it still farther than Brunhild had done, and snatching up Gunther leaped far beyond the stone, carrying him. Believing Gunther to have performed these feats of his own strength, Brunhild confessed herself conquered by him, and proclaimed to her people that Gunther was thenceforth their lord.

Siegfried hastened to the bark, laid aside his cloak of invisibility and returned to the castle. His comrades, with the queen and her people, were assembled in the great hall of the fortress, and as he joined them he began, in the most unconstrained manner possible, to inquire when the games would take place.

“Why, Sir Siegfried, where have you been!” exclaimed Brunhild; “the games are over, and your liege is victorious.”

Hagen here took it upon himself to explain that Siegfried had been busied in the bark, and that in the universal excitement none of them had thought of summoning him. Siegfried interrupted him by exclaiming:

“Well pleased am I, noble king’s daughter, that

the man lives who is worthy to be your lord. So then we shall carry you back with us to the Rhine."

"Be not so hasty," spake Brunhild. "Before ceding my land to other rule I must hold counsel with my vassals."

In truth her messengers had been already sent forth to bid her liegemen assemble without delay in Isenstein. Ere the lapse of many days the fortress was filled with armed men. Hagen felt that this movement portended mischief, but the deft Siegfried, ablest of men, speedily stilled all fears by promising to produce a yet more potent array of warriors. Gunther eagerly asked how this could be done, but Siegfried declined explaining, saying that the resources at his command must remain secret for the present. Then the king expressed a reluctance at parting, even temporarily, with his friend, but Siegfried promised a speedy return with one thousand trusty knights. Should the queen note his absence, he said, it would be advisable to tell her that the king had sent him on some important mission.

EIGHTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED FARED TO THE NIBELUNGENLAND.

SIEGFRIED went down to the beach, where the bark was moored, stepped on board, after donning his Tarnkappe, and pushed off from shore. Whoever could see that vessel would naturally believe it to be drifting thence without human aid, impelled by a strong breeze. In reality, as we know, it was guided by Siegfried, who was stoutly rowing toward the Nibelungen land, where were stored his hard-earned treasures.

Within twenty-four hours the hero reached the mysterious country which was his goal. Securing his bark to the shore of the broad island, he sought shelter, as any wayfarer might have done, at the gates of a fortress situated on a mountain. The gates were bolted and barred according to the custom of the land, and Siegfried knocked loudly for admittance. A mighty giant was the porter, and he angrily cried:

“Who knocks thus violently at the gate?”

Disguising his voice, bold Siegfried replied:

“I am a stranger knight. Make open to me at once, I conjure you, or I will this night arouse with no gentle hand those who would gladly take their sleep.”

Seizing his sword, the giant flung open the gates, and sprang with furious might upon Siegfried. A

terrible struggle ensued, but although Siegfried was sorely pressed, he finally overcame the giant. He had no desire to take the trusty porter's life, therefore merely bound him with cords and left him disabled upon the ground. The noise of the contest had reached the ears of Alberich the dwarf, and at this juncture he appeared, grasping his seven-thonged whip, each thong of which was mounted with a golden knob. Furious indeed was the onslaught he made upon Siegfried, but the latter, seizing his powerful opponent by the long beard, hurled him to the ground. Alberich piteously begged for mercy, and cried:

“Truly do I see that you are a mighty hero. Were I not already the vassal of an invincible knight, I would proudly serve you my life long. Prithee tell me your name, that I may know by whom I have been conquered.”

“I am Siegfried,” was the calm reply.

“Then indeed are you rightfully master of this land,” exclaimed Alberich, overjoyed at this announcement. “Spare my life, my liege, and I will gladly do whatever you command.”

“Hasten, then,” said Siegfried, relaxing his hold, “to arouse for me the Nibelungen hosts. Make ready one thousand men to accompany me hence forthwith, and no harm shall befall you.”

With these words he set both Alberich and the giant at liberty, and they lost no time in acquainting the Nibelungen hosts with Siegfried's orders. The warriors sprang joyously from their beds and hastened to make ready to greet their liege lord. Soon there were assembled three thousand knights,

and of these Siegfried selected one thousand of the ablest and best. He bade them equip in all the splendor at their command, in order to sail with him far over the seas, and his orders were obeyed with incredible speed.

One morning Gunther stood with Brunhild at her castle window, and both were gazing out over the blue waters. Suddenly the royal maiden exclaimed :

“What ships can those be yonder, with the snow-white sails? The sea is studded with them.”

“That is the fleet of my body-guard,” boldly replied Gunther. “It has been awaiting my orders, and comes hither now at my command to escort us home.”

Brunhild saw herself outwitted, and meekly asked the king how she should receive the unlooked-for guests. Gunther begged of her to go forward herself to meet them, and she did as he desired. Thus it came to pass that the Nibelungen hosts were entertained in princely fashion.

Brunhild wished to bestow gifts upon her new guests, after the custom of the day; but the task of providing for such a host being no trifling one, she declared that she would be forever grateful to whomsoever would assume it for her. Dankwart thereupon offered his services, and handing him her keys, the queen bade him dispense gold and fine raiment as he saw fit. With lavish hand Hagen’s brother scattered around the treasure stores of Isenstein, and the poor of the land, as well as the stranger knights, were by him loaded with costly presents. Brunhild finally became alarmed, and piteously appealed to the king.

“Your chamberlain is squandering all my treasures,” quoth she, “and my presses will, I fear, be utterly despoiled of raiment. He seems to fancy that I have sent for death to fetch me, and I mean to live. Whither I now go I can surely bear with me my heritage.”

“Noble lady,” here interposed Hagen, “the king of the Rhineland is so rich in gold and fine raiment that it is needless for you to bear hence any of your own possessions.”

“Nay, if you love me,” began the queen, turning to Gunther, “permit me to carry with me at least twenty traveling chests filled with gold, precious stones and silks. If this be granted me I will joyfully dispense my treasures with my own hands so soon as we reach Burgundy.”

It was impossible to deny her request, and the packing began forthwith. The queen, however, to the intense amusement of Gunther and Hagen, was unwilling to trust this entirely to Dankwart’s supervision, but insisted that her own people should be present.

And now Brunhild appointed her mother’s brother regent of Isenland until Gunther’s officials should arrive, selected for her escort eighty-six noble dames, one hundred beauteous damsels, and two thousand brave knights, took leave of those who were to remain behind, and then set forth upon her journey. It was the noble maiden’s last farewell to her fatherland. The winds being propitious, the vessels were soon far out at sea, and as arrangements had been made for every conceivable pastime, the voyage was a right merry one.

NINTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED WAS SENT TO WORMS.

ON the ninth day of the homeward voyage, Hagen called Gunther's attention to the advisability of dispatching messengers to Worms, in order to relieve the anxiety at court, and order suitable preparation to be made for the reception of the bride. King Gunther was pleased with this suggestion, and at once declared that no one was better fitted for such a mission than Hagen himself. Hagen, however, objected.

"Nay, dear liege," said he, "no pleasing messenger am I. Let me stay with the fleet, and ask Siegfried to go instead. Should he object, urge him to comply for love of your sister."

So Gunther sent for Siegfried and affectionately laid the case before him, saying that it would be a great relief to his mind to have so well tried a friend bear the glad tidings to Worms. The high-minded Siegfried rather hesitated at first, but when the king urged him to precede the fleet for Kriemhild's sake, he demurred no longer.

"You have but to command, and I will obey anything that is for the sake of the peerless maiden whose image reigns supreme within my heart," cried the hero.

Thereupon King Gunther besought his friend to lose no time in relieving the anxiety of dame Ute,

Kriemhild and all who were at court, and to implore the lovely Kriemhild, in especial, to accord her most gracious welcome to the high-born bride. Also he sent a loving message to Ortwin, requesting him to oversee the arrangements for a princely reception. After receiving his orders, Siegfried paid his respects to Queen Brunhild, and with a company of four-and-twenty knights entered a small vessel and steered for shore. The champions took with them their horses, and when they landed they rode along the Rhine banks to Worms.

When the people saw Siegfried enter the city without their king, they were filled with consternation. Noble Gernot and good young Giselher ran out to meet their friend as he approached the castle, and Giselher exclaimed:

“Welcome, Sir Siegfried! What tidings do you bring? Where is our brother? Where are our other friends? Woe betide the day they left their homes if their lives have been forfeited to haughty Brunhild’s might!”

“Away with your fears,” rejoined Siegfried; “your brother himself hath sent me hither to bid you make ready for the reception of his bride.”

Then he proceeded to relate to attentive listeners the adventures at Isenstein, and begged that the joyful tidings might be borne without delay to dame Ute and fair Kriemhild.

“Bear them yourself,” cried young Giselher; “it will please my sister well. Anxiety for our brother has heavily oppressed the maiden’s heart. You will prove a welcome guest to her, I can vouch for that.”

“Wherein I can serve the peerless maiden,” spake

Siegfried, the knight, "I shall always be found faithful. Who will announce me to the ladies?"

"That will I do," replied Giselher, that noble youth, and forthwith he hastened to seek his mother and sister. He told them that the hero of the Netherlands had arrived with tidings of their king, and that he desired to hold audience with them.

The ladies hied them to their robing-rooms, and after arraying themselves in all the splendor at their command, they sent word to Siegfried that they awaited his pleasure. Gladly did the noble youth avail himself of this permission, rejoicing at the opportunity of beholding without delay the lady of his love. When he came into her presence, Kriemhild, that lovely maiden, thus addressed him:

"Welcome, Sir Siegfried, knight beyond compare! Where tarries my brother Gunther, the noble king? Much fear I that through Brunhild's cruel might he is lost to us. Ah, woe is me, poor maiden!"

Then spake the dauntless knight:

"Now give me messenger's fee," he cried. "Your tears, fair ladies, have been shed without a cause. I come direct from the king with tidings of his success."

Hereupon he narrated all that he deemed expedient of the experiences the little party of brave knights had undergone. Kriemhild brushed the glittering tears from her eyes, and her whole face shone with radiance as her ruby lips parted to give utterance to the gratitude swelling her heart. In her snow-white garments she presented an appearance of rare loveliness as she bade the princely messenger be seated, and thus accosted him:

“How gladly would I shower upon you my gold in messenger’s fee! Yet you are, I know, of too high estate. Therefore accept, I pray you, my life-long gratitude.”

“And were I lord of thirty realms,” was impetuous Siegfried’s reply, “I should gladly accept gifts from your hand.”

“Then shall you be gratified,” cried the damsel, and dispatched her treasurer for the costly guerdon. Four-and-twenty bracelets, richly studded with precious stones, she then presented with her own white hands to the hero. Rejoiced as Siegfried was to receive them, it would have been contrary to knightly custom to retain these gifts; he therefore graciously distributed them among the court maidens.

Dame Ute had also been profuse in her expressions of delight over the warrior’s glad tidings, and she freely promised to see that her beloved son’s orders about the guests’ reception were executed. Siegfried finally told Kriemhild how desirous her brother was to have her accord a loving welcome to his bride.

“His will shall be done,” said the fair maiden. “Wherein I can serve my brother he shall never be denied.”

Siegfried now departed, feeling assured that never before had messenger been so graciously received.

Orders were forthwith given for the decoration of the palace; guests were invited to watch for the approach of the fleet, seats thrown up on the beach for their accommodation, while knights and peerless ladies prepared to go forth on horseback. Six-and-eighty dames and many a blooming damsel, each mounted on a gentle palfrey, with fair Kriemhild at their head, presented an imposing effect.

TENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW GUNTHER CELEBRATED HIS NUPTIALS WITH BRUNHILD.

THE vessels with their royal freight gallantly neared the shore. Old Queen Ute herself rode forth with the equestrian party to meet the king and his bride. Brave Ortwin led the noble dame's horse by the bridle, while the margrave, Gere, did like service for fair Kriemhild, on whose other side proudly rode Siegfried, ever ready to proffer his aid. Thus rode a knight beside each lady.

Knights and ladies dismounted as Gunther, Brunhild, and their united retinues, stepped ashore. After saluting her brother, sweet Kriemhild warmly extended her hand to the stranger queen, and exclaimed:

“Most welcome are you to our land! My mother and I, with all the friends who are true to us, greet you lovingly.”

Then the two royal maidens fell into each other's arms, and each bestowed repeated kisses upon the other's rosy lips. Dame Ute also received her son's bride with the utmost tenderness. While all the needful presentations and salutations were taking place, Brunhild and Kriemhild stood side by side, gazing admiringly at each other, and many a hero present thought that more lovely a spectacle had never been witnessed.

So soon as knights and ladies had taken their

places on horseback, or on the scaffoldings erected for the accommodation of guests, there was held a grand tournament of rejoicing; lances flew hither and thither in wild confusion, and the whole Rhine beach was alive with excitement. Not least among the feats of skill were those performed by Siegfried and his Nibelungen knights,—in fact, Siegfried, as usual, bore off the palm. At set of sun, when the cool breezes were wafted over from the river, the guests were ushered into the palace, where a most sumptuous banquet awaited their coming. Dame Ute and fair Kriemhild retired with their retinues, as was customary, to their own hall, while King Gunther proceeded to lead Queen Brunhild to his own royal table. At this moment Siegfried approached and reminded his friend, as he was most truly entitled to do, of a certain vow.

“Pause a moment,” cried the hero of the Netherlands, “and think of your vow to bestow upon me your sister’s hand. I kept all my promises and refused you no service.”

“You remind me well,” spake the host of the Rhine. “I never break my word.”

Kriemhild was forthwith summoned into her brother’s presence. She appeared, surrounded by her maidens; but Giselher, springing from his place, urged the dismissal of these, in order that his sister might hold audience alone with the king. So Kriemhild was led to the spot where her brother Gunther awaited her. Brunhild had been already seated at table. Then spake King Dankrat’s heir:

“Help me, trusty friends, in persuading my sister to take Siegfried for her wedded lord.”

“Ay, that were well done,” was the unanimous reply.

“Sister, noble maiden,” then continued the king, turning to the blushing fair one, “in the name of your virtue aid me in fulfilling my vow. I promised your hand to a brave knight, and if you take him for your husband you will please me well.”

“Dear brother,” replied the maiden, “as you command so shall I obey. The knight whom you have chosen I will accept.”

Siegfried flushed with rapturous delight, and hastened forward to offer fair Kriemhild his hand. She accepted it shyly, after the wont of maidens, and thus, surrounded by the king and his heroes, this significant betrothal took place. In the presence of all the knights, Siegfried clasped the glorious maiden in his arms and imprinted ardent kisses upon her rosy lips. After this the pair were conducted to the seats of honor, where they were waited upon with all due ceremony, and overwhelmed with heartfelt congratulations.

King Gunther returned to the side of the waiting Brunhild. The latter was sorely troubled at seeing Kriemhild take her seat beside Siegfried, and she wept until the tears fell in torrents over her lovely cheeks.

“What is it, my spouse?” spake the host of the land; “what thus clouds the dazzling splendor of your eyes? Surely this is a season of rejoicing, for my land, my rich fortresses, and my many faithful knights, are now subject to you.”

“Rather is it a season of lamentation,” replied Brunhild. “My heart is heavy for your sister. I

have seen her take her seat at your vassal's side. Does it not behoove me to bewail her downfall?"

"Let us not speak of it now," said King Gunther. "Some other time I will explain to you how Kriemhild came to be given to Siegfried in marriage. Believe me, she will be happy with him."

"Her sorrowful fate grieves me because of her beauty," persisted Brunhild. "I shall never be your wedded wife until you tell me wherefore Kriemhild is permitted to become Siegfried's bride."

"It is easily told," replied the king. "Siegfried is himself a king's son, and will one day rule over fortresses and broad lands. Therefore have I allowed him to woo our glorious maid beyond compare."

Still Brunhild failed to be satisfied, and she continued sorrowful throughout the remainder of the festivities. That night, after the princely couples had been conducted with great pomp to the bridal chambers, Brunhild again entreated her lord to unfold to her the entire secret of his sister's marriage. He deftly evaded her queries, as he had done before; whereupon the dread queen, feeling convinced that she was being deceived, seized her royal spouse in her powerful arms, bound him hand and foot with a certain magic girdle she wore, and hung him thereby to a nail on the wall.

Poor Gunther's heart sank within him at this new proof of the vast strength of his bride, who, he began to fear, might be the foul fiend in woman's form. He who should have been master was reduced to humbly suing for his release, but she to whom his words were addressed paid them no heed. Ere long the inexorable Brunhild was wrapt in a peaceful

slumber, while King Gunther vibrated, suspended from his peg, until morning dawned.

The ensuing day the joustings and merry-makings were resumed, but it was a touching sight, acting like a damper upon all who came into contact with him, to see with how sorrowful a mien King Gunther wore his crown. Siegfried noted this, as the two friends met after early mass, and inquired into the cause, although he well divined it. Gunther confided to him the events of the preceding night, showed his swollen hands, and told how utterly exhausted he felt. Siegfried's noble heart glowed with tender compassion, and he hastened to promise his royal friend that if he would listen to his counsel all should yet be well.

“I am so happy with your sister,” said he, “that I must see you also happy. To-night, with your consent, I will come to your chamber, concealed from view in my *Tarnkappe*, and will wrest from haughty Brunhild her girdle and the magic ring she wears. In these lie the secret of her supernatural strength; without them she will be as tractable as any other woman.”

Gunther was only too glad to accept this offer, and it was agreed that the extinguishing of a lamp in the ante-chamber should be the signal of Siegfried's approach. With lightened heart the host of the Rhineland now participated in the day's festivities, and he smilingly regarded his beauteous bride, elated at the thought of his forthcoming triumph.

That night Brunhild once more insisted upon Gunther's imparting to her the desired information, but he, depending upon Siegfried, whom by the

agreed signal he knew to be present, refused. The queen sprang forward to bind him as before, but Siegfried, in his Tarnkappe, resisted the attack in Gunther's stead. A terrible struggle ensued, and many times it seemed as though one of the opponents must assuredly fall victim to the other's marvelous strength. Gunther awaited the result with anxious apprehensions, and felt wondrously relieved when finally both girdle and ring were wrested from proud Brunhild, thus ending the struggle. Having no reason to suppose herself conquered by other than her own lord, the queen, though indignant, was filled with new respect for Gunther, and henceforth was very humble in her demeanor toward him.

Meanwhile Siegfried returned to his own lovely spouse. He had disappeared very mysteriously from her side, and she had been greatly puzzled thereby. Now when he rejoined her she plied him with questions. These he at first evaded, but finally, having perfect confidence in the wife of his bosom, he told her what had occurred. Alas! how many brave knights were brought to their end through this one rash act of confidence! A curse was on the ill-fated ring and girdle, and if they did not endow Kriemhild with the magic strength of their former possessor, they made her, nevertheless, the instrument of incalculable mischief.

The wedding festivities lasted until the twelfth day, and during the whole time the castle walls rang with sounds of joustings and merriment. Presents were distributed without stint—costly garments, jewels, gold and richly caparisoned horses. Then the guests departed, and the high-tide was at an end.

ELEVENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED JOURNEYED HOME WITH HIS BRIDE.

WHEN all the guests were gone, King Siegmund's son ordered his people to make ready to return home. This delighted Kriemhild, for she was all eagerness to behold her husband's land, and she was impatient to set forth. Siegfried was not a little pleased thereby, but he was quite as much pained when he learned that his dear wife had demanded a fourth part of the estate of her fathers for her dower.

The royal brethren were perfectly willing to make the division, but Siegfried proudly declined. He told his friends that Kriemhild could readily dispense with her portion of their lands, since through her marriage she had become one of the wealthiest women upon earth, but he expressed his thanks for the well-meant offer.

“If you disdain my heritage,” cried dame Kriemhild, “let me at least take with me an escort of the Burgundian knights. No king need scorn to be followed by these to his own land.”

This suggestion met with universal approbation, and Gernot assured his sister that she was welcome to one thousand chosen knights. So Kriemhild summoned Hagen and Ortwin, and asked whether they were willing to accompany her, with those under

their command. Hagen, flashing wrathful glances about him, proudly refused, in the name of both.

“Our place is with our lieges,” quoth he. “King Gunther cannot resign us to any one in the world. Seek other vassals to accompany you to the stranger’s land.”

Thereupon Kriemhild appointed margrave Eckewart to lead her escort of five hundred knights, considering this number ample, and thirty-two maidens. A tender leave-taking ensued, after which the princely pair and their retinue set forth from the Burgundian land. Messengers were dispatched onward to inform King Siegmund and Queen Siegelind that their beloved son was approaching with his bride, fair Kriemhild. No tidings could have occasioned greater rejoicings.

“Blest be the day,” cried father Siegmund, “that shall see fair Kriemhild wear our crown! The worth of my heritage is enhanced to me through these tidings. My son Siegfried must now consent to be crowned king.”

Siegelind bestowed upon the messengers garments of crimson velvet, also much gold and silver. Then she made ready with many beautiful ladies, and sallied forth with her husband and his knights to meet her children. They made a day’s journey to a fortress called Santen before they met the bridal suite. Both Siegmund and Siegelind bestowed many fond kisses upon dame Ute’s fair child, as well as upon their own brave Siegfried. The anxiety that had long oppressed the noble parents was now wholly removed, and they bore joyful countenances while welcoming their guests.

Magnificent as had been the wedding festivities at Worms, they were excelled by those in the Netherlands. The heroes were presented with more costly jewel-studded garments than they had ever before worn, and all marveled at the evidences of unexampled wealth. While the rejoicings were at their height, King Siegmund proclaimed his determination to abdicate in favor of his son. This proclamation met with universal approbation, and without further delay Siegfried was crowned king. For many a long day he reigned in peace and joy, and there was sunshine throughout the realm.

This was interrupted by but one sad occurrence, and that was the death of good Queen Siegelind. She was buried with all due pomp, and her place thenceforth filled by Kriemhild. Just before the old queen's death, Kriemhild had presented her fond husband with a boy, who was the pride of both parents and grandparents. The child was christened Gunther, out of compliment to his uncle, the Burgundian king. In return, Gunther and Brunhild named their first child, also a boy, Siegfried. Both royal couples bestowed every attention upon the training and education of their sons, being determined that nothing which might tend to their weal should be left undone.

The Nibelungen lands remained subject to Siegfried. The hoard had been bestowed by him upon Kriemhild as a bridal portion. The Nibelungen knights never ceased to feel pride in their liege lord, and indeed all over whom the hero reigned were crowned with unwonted prosperity. Truly might it be said that never did nobler knight sit upon horse than brave Siegfried of old.

TWELFTH ADVENTURE.

HOW GUNTHER INVITED SIEGFRIED TO A GRAND HIGH-TIDE.

YEARS rolled swiftly by, and dame Brunhild never ceased to marvel why Kriemhild had been permitted to wed a vassal. Also, she felt sorely perplexed to know how Siegfried had become a vassal in the first place, and being such, why he never came to pay his respects to his liege lord. Over all this she brooded in secret, not daring to broach the subject to Gunther.

One day she told her husband that she ardently longed once more to behold their dear Kriemhild. Her mind was constantly filled with recollections of their first meeting, she said, and her greatest desire was to have a visit from lovely Kriemhild and brave Siegfried.

“How were it possible to bring them here?” said Gunther; “I dare not ask them to come, they live too far distant.”

“Let a vassal be ever so mighty or far distant,” haughtily cried dame Brunhild, “he is bound to heed the bidding of his liege lord.”

King Gunther quietly smiled to himself at these arrogant words, but did not see fit to make direct reply thereto. However, when Brunhild continued to weary him with her importunities, he told her

that no guests in the world could be more welcome at court than precisely these dear relatives, and he promised to summon them forthwith. So he dispatched margrave Gere with thirty knights to Siegfried's land to invite the hero and his wife to attend a gay high-tide to be held at Worms the ensuing summer solstice.

"Tell our dear brother," said he to the margrave at parting, "that my royal spouse and I will be ever grateful to him if he grant us this favor. Say to him that he will find here many knights who are ever ready to do him honor, and beseech him to bring with him such of his own knights as he may choose. Make also my deepest reverence to good King Siegmund, and entreat him to join the party. Tell my dear sister we all yearn for sight of her."

Dame Brunhild and old dame Ute added their loving messages to these of the king, and then the messengers set forth upon their mission. At the end of twelve days they reached that fortress in the Nibelungen land where Siegfried and Kriemhild now dwelt. Word was brought the royal pair that a party of knights was without, wearing the Burgundian costume. Kriemhild sent one of her maidens to make observations from the casement, but her impatience led her to speedily follow, herself, whereupon she immediately recognized margrave Gere.

"Verily, yonder in the court," she joyfully cried to Siegfried, "is our brave Gere. My brother Gunther must have sent him hither from the Rhine."

"Right heartily welcome is he," was Siegfried's rejoinder.

Attendants were dispatched without further delay to admit the guests. A most cordial reception was extended to these, Kriemhild herself going forward to meet them, and leading in margrave Gere by the hand, in token of kindly feeling. Siegfried bade the weary guests be seated, but Gere asked permission to deliver, first of all, the message with which he was charged.

“Ay, truly,” said Siegfried; “set our minds at ease without delay. Has any mischance befallen my beloved wife’s kinsfolk on the Rhine? If such be the case, they may rely upon me for aid.”

“No, heaven be praised,” said the margrave, “all is well with them. I am sent by my liege lord from Worms, most noble king, to invite you, out of love for himself and dame Brunhild, my royal mistress, to grant them a visit this coming summer solstice. They hold then a gay high-tide, which they long to have honored with your presence, that of your queen, your royal father, and such of your brave knights as you deem proper to have accompany you.”

“That were not easily accomplished,” was Siegfried’s reply.

Then Gere expatiated upon how greatly their presence was desired, how urgent worthy dame Ute was that they should come, and how truly Gernot and Giselher longed to see them. Kriemhild earnestly besought her husband to accept the invitation, and finally Siegfried promised to consult with his friends upon the subject.

The messengers were treated with the highest consideration, but at the expiration of nine days

they began to feel impatient to receive their answer, that they might return home. Meanwhile Siegfried had been advised by his friends to accept the invitation, and to take with him a force of one thousand Nibelungen knights. He then asked his father to journey with him to Worms, and the excellent old man consented, agreeing to be ready within twelve days with an hundred knights of the Netherlands. Siegfried thereupon sent for the messengers, and charged them to tender his affectionate salutations to their sovereign and his lady, and say that the invitation should be right joyfully accepted. Making them many costly presents, he then dismissed them.

When the messengers reached Worms with the cheering intelligence that Siegfried, Kriemhild and the venerable King Siegmund were on their way thither with their retinues, there was great rejoicing. Brunhild had many questions to ask regarding everything that had been seen, and seemed particularly anxious to know whether Kriemhild had preserved her beauty in its full height, to which she was answered in the affirmative. Dame Ute was chiefly desirous to learn of her daughter's welfare, and found every reason to be content with the tidings thereof.

At sight of the magnificent presents from the Nibelungen land, the people loudly extolled Siegfried's princely generosity. Hagen alone failed to join in the universal cry of approbation.

“Ay, to be sure,” quoth he; “Siegfried can well afford to scatter abroad his treasures with lavish hand. Is not he master of the Nibelungen hoard?

Would that we could secure unto ourselves this treasure beyond compare!"

The whole court of Worms was now in a bustle of excitement. Knight vied with knight in preparing to worthily do honor to the expected guests. Nor were the ladies forgetful of their part; they busied themselves in embroidering the richest devices, and jewels beyond compare glittered upon many a sumptuous garment by means of their skill.

THIRTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE INVITATION WAS ACCEPTED.

IN due course of time, Siegfried, Kriemhild, good King Siegmund, and their suite, having completed their extensive preparations, took leave of the Nibelungen land, and set forth upon their journey. Light were their hearts as they rode onward, one and all indulging in the vain delusion that much joy would be derived from the step they were taking. Alas, they knew not to what dire misery it would lead! The venerable King Siegmund would never have countenanced the visit to Worms had he foreseen its results.

Siegfried and Kriemhild were compelled to leave their little son at home. He was too young to bring on so long a journey, therefore all suitable provisions were made for his safety at home during the absence of his parents. Neither father nor mother ever beheld him more.

When the travelers drew near Worms, Siegfried sent messengers in advance to announce their approach. These were met by sundry of King Gunther's vassals, who hastened to apprise their lord that his honored guests were nigh at hand. The king was rejoiced, and seeking his royal consort he thus addressed her:

“Do you remember, Brunhild, how my sister

Kriemhild received you when you came into this land? It is my wish that you receive our trusty Siegfried's wife as well."

"Ay, that I will," was Brunhild's hearty rejoinder; for notwithstanding her inordinate curiosity, she cherished a warm regard for Kriemhild. "Most dear to my heart is your sister, my lord."

The Burgundian knights and ladies rode forth beyond the city gates to meet the coming guests. Most joyful were the greetings which ensued, and it was an especially touching sight to behold the lovely manner in which dame Brunhild received her husband's sister. King Siegmund was overwhelmed with the highest honors, and King Gunther bade him heartily welcome to his land.

"God bless you all!" spake Siegmund, that venerable man. "Since my son Siegfried won you for friends, my heart hath yearned to see you, ye warriors brave."

The two queens rode home to the castle side by side, and it truly seemed as though they could never weary of expressing their delight at once more being together. Also the intercourse between the Burgundian knights and ladies of Kriemhild's train and their old friends was very pleasant.

At the castle, brilliant preparations for entertainment awaited the guests. Festivity followed upon festivity, services of thanksgiving were celebrated in the churches, tournaments were held, the castle walls resounded with gay peals of music, and no expense was spared to produce universal enjoyment. All was peace and harmony until the eleventh day.

Brunhild's satisfaction in the visit of her friends

was soon swallowed up in wonderment over the state in which they appeared. The old fixed idea kept constantly recurring to her mind.

“I shall bear it no longer,” thought she, at last. “Kriemhild herself must tell me wherefore her husband demeans himself so arrogantly, and wherefore he never pays tribute to us, as is our due. With all his grandeur, he is only one of our vassals.”

Thus she worked herself up until she attained a frame of mind which gave the spirit of evil entire power over her. The germ which had long lain dormant within her breast developed to maturity, thereby carrying misery into many hearts.

FOURTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE QUEENS RATED EACH OTHER.

ONE evening, just before the vesper hour, the queens sat talking together at an upper window of the castle, as they watched the games of skill taking place in the court. Each lady was secretly congratulating herself upon the superiority of her own husband over all other knights, however noble.

“I have a husband,” cried Kriemhild, at last, utterly unable to longer restrain herself from giving vent to her thoughts, “whom yonder knights, one and all, might feel proud to call liege.”

“Pray how can that be,” retorted dame Brunhild, “so long as my Gunther lives?”

“Only watch him as he stands there,” continued Kriemhild, not paying the slightest heed to this interruption. “See how grandly he excels all other knights in beauty and in strength. He walks before all other men, outshining them as doth the moon the stars.”

“However handsome and noble he may be,” hotly exclaimed Brunhild, “Gunther, your noble brother, takes precedence in all respects. He stands first among the kings of the earth.”

“I have good reason for what I say,” cried Kriemhild, significantly. “Believe me, Brunhild, my husband is, to say the least, the peer of yours.”

"Try me not too far, Kriemhild," was the indignant rejoinder. "My words also are well founded, for when Gunther so valiantly wooed and won me, he told me with his own lips that Siegfried was his vassal. Moreover, Siegfried said so himself."

"Why in the world would my royal brothers have bestowed my hand in marriage upon a vassal?" laughed Kriemhild. "But come, Brunhild, let us drop this foolish theme."

"That I will never do," cried Brunhild. "Why should I dispense with the services of this haughty vassal, and those who are subject to him?"

"Dispense with them you must forevermore," angrily retorted Kriemhild. "Do you not know that my hero is a mighty king, far exceeding my brother Gunther in rank and riches? No tribute is due from Siegfried to either you or your husband, and it astonishes me, Brunhild, that you persist in talking so absurdly."

"Beware how you demean yourself so haughtily," cried Brunhild, by this time bubbling over with wrath. "Henceforth it shall be clearly determined which of us two be first in rank."

"Ay, truly, it shall be determined," said Kriemhild, now thoroughly aroused. "Since you make so bold as to declare my husband to be vassal to yours, it shall be seen this day, by the knights of both our consorts, that I dare enter the minster before King Gunther's queen."

"Try it, if so be that you will persist in your arrogant assumption. When the hour draws near, we will approach the minster with our ladies from different directions, and at the minster door this question of rank shall be set at rest forever."

“It shall indeed,” quoth Kriemhild.

By the time they parted, both ladies had reached the highest pitch of flaming anger. Each retired to her own apartments to add solid fuel to the flames. Kriemhild had herself and her three-and-forty maidens attired in finer than royal apparel, and gave orders, also, that her husband’s knights should don their most royal attire. Brunhild, on her part, had spared no pains to have her retinue present an imposing appearance, and her fury knew no bounds at finding herself wholly outdone in splendor.

The bystanders marveled greatly at beholding the queens, who had hitherto always appeared together in public, thus separately approaching the minster. They had cause for still greater amazement when both royal trains reached the sacred edifice. At the door, Kriemhild made a movement to enter first, and Brunhild gave a peremptory order for her to stop.

“Hold!” exclaimed the infuriated woman. “Before king’s wife vassal shall never go.”

“Had you held your peace,” cried fair Kriemhild — and right angry was her mood — “it were better for you. Since you have chosen to speak in public, I shall also proclaim aloud, that the whole world may know it, something that may do you good to hear.”

Then Kriemhild repeated the story of Brunhild’s treatment of the royal Gunther on their bridal night, and told how Siegfried had subsequently interfered in his friend’s behalf. When Brunhild heard this true version of a story, none of which she especially enjoyed having divulged to the public, she began to weep with rage, and Siegfried’s

wife took advantage of her confusion to sweep proudly into the church.

Poor Brunhild made no effort to resist this further indignity. She stood without the minster doors during the entire service, and full sorely did she rue the day which gave her birth. When finally Kriemhild reappeared, Brunhild arrested her progress to demand proofs of her startling assertions. For sole reply, Kriemhild paraded before the stricken woman the golden ring which graced her lily-white hand, and the girdle of Nineveh silk, well garnished with precious stones, encircling her slender waist. Brunhild recognized them, and at once a new light broke over her history. Nevertheless she assumed a bold front, furiously accused Kriemhild of having stolen her property, and angrily threatened to complain to her husband of how she had been wronged and insulted. Without deigning any reply, Kriemhild went her way.

The work of evil which was to cause so much misery was now well under way. King Gunther was summoned to the spot, and when he found his wife in tears he became very solicitous to know their cause. The weeping woman gave her own version of what had transpired, and expressed her conviction that Siegfried had incited his wife to this outrageous conduct.

“Let us call Siegfried hither,” cried Gunther, “and we shall soon know how blameworthy he is.”

So Siegfried was sent for, and when he came he was astonished at the scene awaiting him. He inquired into the cause of so much weeping and lamentation, and upon learning what had occurred,

he expressed his grief at the part his Kriemhild had acted, solemnly declaring that he was in nowise responsible for it.

“Women should learn to bridle their tongues,” quoth he. “Command your wife to desist henceforth from idle tattling, friend Gunther, and I shall do the same by mine. Such overweening folly puts me to shame, and Kriemhild shall have cause to rue it.”

This assurance thoroughly satisfied Gunther, but not so with Brunhild. Far from being appeased, she was more indignant than ever that no apology had been offered her, no explanation attempted of how her ring and girdle came to be in Kriemhild’s possession. Sadder day she never saw, and she fell to sobbing and moaning with more vehemence than ever. Her heart was wounded beyond healing, and the old well-springs of ill-feeling toward the hero of the Netherlands united into a fell flood of hatred.

It was thus that she was found by Hagen of Tronje, himself all too ready to seize upon cause for vengeance. Upon hearing her story, he solemnly vowed that he would never rest so long as Siegfried beheld the sun’s light. Ortwin, Gernot and Giselher came up while they were talking and joined them. Ortwin united with Hagen in counseling revenge upon Siegfried, but Giselher exclaimed:

“Alas, my friends, you know not what you say! Siegfried has ever shown us unwavering affection; surely he has in nowise merited such hatred.”

“We were base cowards,” cried Hagen, “did we longer suffer his arrogance to go unpunished. We must deliver ourselves from this Siegfried’s power.”

Gunther was sorely grieved at this new turn of affairs, and strove to appease the wrath of his friends. He reminded them of how lavish Siegfried had been of his friendly services, and how much cause they all had to be grateful to him.

“Besides,” he concluded, “you seem all to have forgotten how impossible it were to vanquish so invincible a hero.”

“Leave that to me,” vauntingly cried Hagen. “If strength fail me, I will overcome him by strategy.”

He then proposed ordering certain vassals to appear at court in the guise of foreign messengers come to proclaim tidings of war. When Siegfried was informed that his friends were about marching out to meet an invading force, he would immediately proffer his services, and when once he was thus lured away from court, means could readily be devised to dispose of him.

At first the king resisted this plan; but every day Hagen whispered into his ear the dangers to which he might be subjected while so powerful a rival monarch as Siegfried lived, until finally his weak nature yielded. Then began preparations for one of the darkest deeds of vengeance ever wrought by envy and ingratitude.

FIFTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED WAS BETRAYED.

ON the fourth morning after the events just recorded, thirty-two horsemen came dashing up to the king's palace at Worms, and demanded audience with King Gunther. These were none other than Hagen's feigned messengers. They represented themselves as having been sent thither by Leudeger, king of the Saxons, and Leudegast, king of the Danes, whom once Siegfried had vanquished, to announce that these potentates were advancing with their armies to seek vengeance for their former defeat. These tidings spread rapidly, causing great consternation, especially among the women of the land.

Advised by Hagen, Gunther made a great show of astonished indignation, and immediately called his confidential vassals around him, under pretense of holding counsel with them regarding the proper course of action. This step nearly frustrated the scheme, for the majority of the knights denounced the base strategy. In his heart of hearts Gunther desired to heed their warning voices, but Hagen gave him no peace until he was wholly ensnared in the meshes of the foul plot.

Siegfried soon observed the excitement going on at court, and was informed of the arrival of the messengers. How could he dream of treachery beneath

this? After his usually generous fashion, he sought out Gunther and proffered his services.

“Siegfried’s hand shall teach these bold intruders a lesson,” quoth he. “Remain you here to guard your dominion with your own knights. At the head of my forces I will devastate the lands of these daring monarchs, and will humble them as I would see all your enemies humbled. You know how rejoiced I always am to serve you, good friend.”

Summoning all the hypocrisy at his command, Gunther thanked Siegfried for his kindness, and professed his readiness to accept so advantageous an offer. Siegfried then hastened to make ready for the expedition. The noble hero of the Netherlands commended his wife to good King Siegmund’s care, and bade them both be of good cheer until his victorious return. A large, well equipped force was assembled, many of the Burgundian knights, Hagen among their number, having united with the Nibelungen heroes, and none but a few confidential vassals had been let into the secret of the movement. The day before that appointed for departure, Hagen went to take leave of dame Kriemhild.

“How proud I am,” said that lady, in the course of conversation, “that I have a husband who is able to lend such ready aid to my brothers. Dear friend Hagen,” she added, abruptly, “I hope you will always remember how dearly I love my kinsfolk, and for this requite my beloved lord. Let not him pay the forfeit if I did Brunhild wrong. Bitterly have I rued it, for my Siegfried was sorely displeased with me and punished me severely.”

“Kriemhild, dear lady,” rejoined the wily knight,

“you will soon be friends again with Brunhild, my sovereign lady, and your lord convinced us at the time that he was in nowise to blame. No one values Siegfried more highly than I, and if you will tell me how I can serve him, I will gladly heed your words.”

“Ah, I should have no cause of fear were my dear lord less daring and thoughtless of self!” cried Siegfried’s queen.

“If you have any especial cause for anxiety, gracious lady,” said Hagen, “confide it to me, and I will risk my life to guard Siegfried from danger.”

Thus tempted, Kriemhild revealed a secret that she should never have given out of her own keeping.

“Yes, my friend,” said she, “I have serious cause for anxiety. I fear not to confide to you my secret, for you are near of kin, and are unquestionably a friend to my lord and me. You have heard how my Siegfried slew a dragon and bathed in its blood, but you do not know all. While he was bathing, a broad linden leaf lodged between his shoulders, and I know no peace when he is in the storm of battle, lest some enemy’s shaft reach the spot where it clung, for there he can be wounded as well as any other mortal. I tell you this that you may shield him from harm.”

“Secure some token on his coat,” eagerly cried Hagen, who saw within his grasp the information he coveted, “that I may know this spot and shield him.”

So Kriemhild promised to embroider a silken cross upon Siegfried’s coat directly over the spot where the linden leaf had lodged, and Hagen joyfully took his leave. He forthwith sought the king,

and told him that he had gained most valuable information which would place Siegfried wholly within his power. Such being the case, he said, it would be best to transform the campaign into a hunting expedition. Gunther, having become a mere tool in his powerful vassal's hands, consented to whatever alterations were deemed advisable in the treacherous plot.

The next morning, just as the forces were ready to set forth, two more feigned messengers appeared, purporting to have been sent in haste by King Leudeger and King Leudegast to announce that it had been decided not to break the peace. Hagen rode up close beside Siegfried, noting with intense satisfaction the position of the silken cross, and imparted to him the tidings. Siegfried was far from pleased, being in his most warlike mood, and he could scarcely be restrained from setting forth at all hazards.

“Heaven reward you, friend Siegfried,” said King Gunther, “for your ever-ready service. I shall re-quite you as it behooves me to do. Suppose now, since this campaign is at an end, that we ride out to hunt the bears and wild boars in the Odenwald?”

“If you go on the chase, I shall be glad to go too,” was Siegfried’s good-natured reply. “Provide me but with some well-trained dogs and a guide, and I will ride with you to the forest.”

“Do you only want one?” asked Gunther, with much show of warmth—he had been instructed by Hagen upon his course; “I can readily provide you with four guides, trusty huntsmen all, who well know the lurking-places of our royal hunting-grounds.”

After dispersing his faithful troops, Siegfried went to apprise his wife of the change of programme, and to make the needful preparations. Meanwhile Hagen had divulged to the king his now fully-matured course of action. Gernot and Giselher refused to join in the chase. Neither one, however, had sufficient resolution to warn their faithful friend of his danger, which they ever after bitterly repented.

SIXTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED WAS SLAIN.

KRIEMHILD had already deeply regretted the disclosure she had made to Hagen. Ever since her husband had left her in the morning she had been tormented with gloomy apprehensions, and she speedily seized the opportunity of his return to entreat him to remain at home. Even the change of his plans did not relieve her anxiety, yet she dared not tell him its cause.

“Give up the chase this time,” said she, “and stay with me. Last night I dreamed that you were pursued by two wild boars upon the heath; the flowers were red with your gore, and full sorely did I weep. Surely these boars signify enemies who will assail you.”

“Dearest love,” replied Siegfried, kissing his wife’s rosy lips, “I have no enemies here. Your friends all love me. Wherefore should it be otherwise? I have never harmed them.”

“Ah, my well-beloved Siegfried,” persisted Kriemhild, “I am sorrowful with dread of coming ill. In my dream methought that two mountains fell and crushed you, and I never beheld you more. Oh, heed this warning, I intreat you!”

“Have done with your foolish forebodings, precious wife. Soon I shall return to laugh away your

dread," cried Siegfried, as he folded his beloved Kriemhild in his arms and tenderly kissed her farewell. Little thought he that this was their final parting.

As the hunting party drew near the Odenwald, Siegfried inquired who proposed leading the chase. Hagen, in reply, suggested that each knight should make separate search for game, as a trial of skill. This was readily agreed upon, the comrades parted, and each chose his own route.

Taking with him an old huntsman and a trusty hound, Siegfried plunged into the thickest of the forest, and the amount of game captured by him was wonderful. Indeed, every wild creature that his eye rested upon fell victim to his skill. The first beast that he encountered was a fierce wild boar. With a mighty death-stroke he felled it to the ground. Then he despaired a grim lion, and taking sure aim he sent an arrow quivering through its heart. Next, he killed a buffalo, four bisons, an elk, together with stags and deers in abundance.

Finally, the hound roused from its lair a wild boar of immense size and ferocity. The bold huntsman's arrow merely wounded this savage creature, and it turned in fury upon its opponent. Siegfried sprang from his horse, drew his sword from its sheath and ran the animal through the body. Another huntsman would scarcely have come off victorious in such a perilous attack. When the wild boar was dispatched, the guide asked whether it would not be prudent to pause awhile in the chase, since otherwise the forest would be utterly despoiled of game. Our hero laughed heartily at this, and promptly tied up his hound.

At this moment there arose a great tumult, which was reechoed through mountain and forest ravine. Four-and-twenty dogs had been let loose by the huntsmen, and so much game was being captured that Hagen and his friends began to triumph in the thought that the palm of victory would be theirs. Not so did they feel when Siegfried appeared among them, and they learned that their combined efforts had not sufficed to accumulate as much game as had been slain by him alone.

The sound of a horn in the distance, the signal agreed upon to call together the huntsmen to partake of the noonday meal, had summoned the hero of the Netherlands to the appointed place of meeting. On his way thither, it must be recorded, an enormous bear had chanced to cross his path.

“Yon bear goes with me to our trysting-place,” said Siegfried. “My comrades shall have some sport with him.”

With these words, he let loose his hound, who dashed swiftly forward to attack the bear. The poor beast turned and fled, but Siegfried and the hound pursued him until he was brought to bay in an abrupt cleft in the mountain side, from whence escape was impossible. Springing from his horse, the knight seized the angry creature, bound him so firmly that he was unable to offer resistance, then remounting, secured the rope to the horse’s saddle.

A truly magnificent sight did our hero present as he rode through the forest, dragging after him the captive bear, while the dog bounded along by his master’s side. The noble knight wore a suit of finest otter skin and black silk, decorated with many-hued

embroideries and rich gold-lace trimmings; his cap was of sable; over one shoulder hung his panther-skin quiver, and he carried a bow of monstrous size, which Siegfried alone among men could bend with his unaided strength. Glittering armor hung about the knightly person; a golden hunting horn was suspended at his side, and in one hand was a spear of huge proportions. The mighty sword Balmung—that weapon whose sharp edge could penetrate the stoutest armor—proudly held its place amid all other accoutrements.

Gunther's people saw brave Siegfried approach the rendezvous, and they hastened forward to take his horse. So soon as the knight had dismounted, he dexterously unloosed the cords binding muzzle and feet, and set his bear at liberty. At sight of this unexpected prize, King Gunther's hounds set up a howl and impatiently shook the chains which bound them; the huntsmen shouted with delight, and the king ordered the hounds unloosed. Terrified by the universal confusion his sudden appearance had occasioned, the poor bear sped hither and thither in search of a loop-hole of escape, and finally cleared the camp-fire, upsetting pots and cauldrons to feed the flames with the food being prepared therein; indeed, sundry cooks were left sprawling upon the ground.

Sad a loss as would be such a piece of game, the huntsmen dared not shoot lest they should endanger the safety of the hounds. Siegfried outstripped these trained animals in the pursuit, overtook the bear, and with his mighty sword gave him the death-blow. All his comrades marveled anew at his strength and

skill when they rode up and became aware of what he had done. One and all felt with awe that he was indeed a powerful man.

Once more they assembled about the table, where, notwithstanding the recent disaster, a bountiful repast had been spread. Siegfried's exertions had sharpened his appetite, and he made a hearty meal. Presently, however, it occurred to him that the cup-bearers were dilatory in presenting the wine. He felt thirsty and could not refrain from expressing his surprise at this negligence, sportively adding that if it were huntsman's fashion to go dry, he was thankful that the chase was not his calling.

"When we reach home," said Gunther — and false was his mood — "this shall be amply atoned for. We may thank Hagen for having no wine here; the fault is his."

"Dear friends," said the knight of Tronje, "and you, my masters, I thought we were bound for Spessart; the hampers of wine were sent there. To-day there is no wine. This shall never happen again."

"Poor thanks can I offer you, Sir Hagen," cried the noble Siegfried. "Seven beasts of burden could hardly have carried mead and wine enough to have slaked our thirst. If we could not have this, we should have camped nearer the Rhine."

"I know a spring of cool, clear water, not far distant, beneath a linden tree. Bear me no ill will, ye swift knights, and I will show it to you," said Hagen.

Siegfried restrained his thirst until all had concluded their repast, and then asked that they might be directed to this spring. As Hagen arose to show the way, he turned to Siegfried, carelessly saying :

"I have heard it said that no one can outstrip Kriemhild's lord in the race, so fleet is he of foot. Is this true?"

"What if we try it?" gaily cried Siegfried, far from suspecting the demoniacal wiles at the bottom of all this. "Let us run a race to the spring, Sir Gunther, you and myself."

"With all my heart!" exclaimed Hagen.

"If I fail to win," said Siegfried, "I will lay me down in the grass at the victor's feet. Moreover, I shall bear with me spear and shield, helmet and armor, together with all the trappings of the chase; you may divest you of what you will."

Thus directed, Hagen and Gunther hastened to remove their heavy garments and lay aside all cumbersome weight, while Siegfried even replaced his bow and quiver of arrows, and took up his ponderous spear and shield. Nevertheless, albeit like two wild panthers the others sped over the clover, he far outstripped them in the race. Immediately upon reaching the spring the brave hero laid down his weapons upon the ground and leaned his shield against the trunk of the linden tree. Beside the sparkling water stood the glorious guest, but his courteous nature forbade his drinking until the royal host had quenched his thirst.

The water was clear, cool and refreshing, and bowing over it his form, Gunther drank deeply. When he arose, Siegfried stooped to do likewise, and while thus engaged the noble knight was strangely requited for all the goodness he had lavished upon his unworthy friends. With stealthy tread, Hagen stole up behind him, removed bow and sword from his

reach, and then, seizing the hero's ponderous spear, he took unerring aim at the cross Kriemhild had wrought upon her husband's garment. Thus, while Siegfried drank from the purling waters of the stream, he was pierced with his own dread weapon, and his heart's blood gushed over his fell destroyer.

Hagen, who never before had shunned mortal man, now turned and fled, and well was it for him that he had removed his victim's weapons. With truly supernatural strength the hero had sprung to his feet, and had he found either bow or sword, notwithstanding his mortal wound and the deadly weapon projecting from his body, Hagen would forthwith have forfeited his life. As it was, the dying hero seized his shield, and springing after the flying assassin, overtook him, felled him to the ground, and beat him until the shield was broken in several places, the ground strewed around with the precious stones with which it was studded. The forest resounded with the blows, and Hagen would surely have been killed had not his chastiser's strength at last given way. The hero could no longer stand erect, all color had forsaken his face, and, with a groan of anguish, he sank down upon the greensward among the flowers. At this moment, Gunther, together with several of his knights, came up, and, with painful effort, Siegfried thus accosted them:

“Woe to you, ye dastards! Of what avail have been my services to you, since thus ye betray me? I have proved myself to be your friend, and ye have illy requited my friendship. The mark of treachery will henceforth be set upon your brows, and generations yet unborn will be pointed at because of it.”

One after another those who had participated in the chase hastened to the spot, and for many it was indeed a joyless day. Stung with remorse and horror at the dying hero's words, the king of the Burgundians began loudly to bewail the deed that would rob him of his friend, at which Siegfried exclaimed:

“What availeth it to deplore a deed you must yourself have sanctioned? Far better would it have been had you forbidden it.”

“There is, indeed, no cause for wailing or woe,” interposed grim Hagen. “Our fears are now forever stilled. Henceforth no mortal exceedeth us in strength, and I glory to think that my hand dealt this death-blow.”

“Small reason have you to glory in your foul treachery,” spake he of the Netherlands. “Had I weened that your seeming friendship cloaked such murderous hate, you had never thus slain me. It grieves me to know that my son's kinsfolk could stoop so low; yet my death I regret for my Kriemhild's sake alone.”

Then with touching simplicity the dying hero turned to Gunther, that false friend, and commended to his protection the darling wife whom he should never more behold upon earth.

“If any spark of virtue yet remains within your breast, O king,” cried he, “let it profit Kriemhild, my beloved wife, that she is your sister, and let her not feel the envious hatred you have borne me. For me, my father and my men shall long wait.”

Gunther made no reply, and writhing in his anguish, Siegfried sobbed forth:

“My bloody death you will rue in the days to

come. Believe me, you have struck your own death-blow."

The flowers all around were deluged with his blood. Then he struggled with death; not long did he this, the murderous shaft cut him too keenly; soon he could speak no more, this bold and noble hero. When the surrounding knights saw that he had breathed his last, they laid him on a gold-red shield, and took counsel together regarding how the truth should be concealed. It was suggested by several that it would be well to report at home that Siegfried, while traversing the forest alone, had been attacked by robbers, and slain before his friends could come to his rescue. The discussion was cut short by Hagen.

"Leave the dead to my care," interposed he. "What care I who knows that this be my deed? As for her, who could so wound our high-born queen, little shall I trouble myself about her tears."

SEVENTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGFRIED WAS BEWAILED AND BURIED.

THE joys of the chase were over and forgotten. Silently and by night the Burgundians crossed the Rhine and entered Worms. Hagen had the corpse placed before Kriemhild's door, where it might meet her gaze when she started for early mass the next morning. Thus did the guilty knight complete his hideous work of vengeance.

Early the next morning the bells sounded for mass. Kriemhild hastened to arouse her maidens, as was her wont, that they might prepare to attend service at the minster. One of the chamberlains, approaching his lady's door with a light, saw the murdered man lying there in his gore. He did not recognize his master, and hastened to make known to his lady that the bloody corpse of a stranger knight was lying without her door. Kriemhild was terrified, for she thought of what she had told Hagen.

“Ah, woe is me!” she shrieked, with a fearful presentiment of the misfortune that had befallen her, and swooned away.

When she regained consciousness, her attendants strove to persuade her that this knight would prove to be an utter stranger, but she refused consolation.

“It is Siegfried, my beloved husband,” she moaned. “I know it is he. Brunhild has devised this, and Hagen's hand has wrought the deed.”

Then she fled wildly to the door where lay the knight, raised his beautiful head with her own white hands, and, all gory though he was, she recognized at once the hero of the Netherlands. Her grief knew no bounds, and a delicate stream of blood trickled down from her lips as she sobbed, and shrieked, and groaned aloud in her anguish. Her people all wept with her; one and all felt that they had lost a friend, and united with her in vowing to avenge the brave knight's death. The sorrow-laden widow at last bethought her to dispatch a messenger to bear the mournful tidings to Siegmund, and bid him come to her. Knocking at the old man's door, the messenger cried:

“King Siegmund, awake! A woeful affliction hath befallen Kriemhild, my mistress, and she bids me summon you, whom it also concerns, to join in her wailing and lamentation.”

“Why should we two, fair Kriemhild and I, have cause for wailing and lamentation?” inquired Siegmund, starting up from his slumbers in alarm.

When the messenger, in response to this, announced that Siegfried had been found, murdered, before Kriemhild's door, the old man refused to believe in the possibility of such a misfortune. He arose, however, aroused an hundred of his knights, and hastened with them to the spot indicated. When his own eyes bore witness to the truth of what he had heard, he lifted up his voice and wept.

“Ah, woe is me, that ever I consented to journey into this land!” spake the aged man, so soon as he could command speech. “Kriemhild, my daughter, who can have robbed you of your husband, me of my child, since we are among good friends?”

“Did I but know,” sobbed Kriemhild, “the friends of my Siegfried’s murderer would soon have cause for wailing.”

Old King Siegmund cast himself with a groan upon the corpse, Kriemhild refused to be comforted, and the whole palace resounded with the groans of the mourners. Attendants finally came, carried thence the warrior’s lovely form, washed and prepared it in princely state for burial, and placed it upon the bier. The Nibelungen heroes, gathering around their master’s body, swore vengeance, and declared that they would never rest until Siegfried’s slayer was found.

“Whosoever he may be,” cried they, at once conjecturing that the assassin was among those who had ridden forth with Siegfried to the chase, “he must be within these castle walls;” and donning their armor they prepared, eleven hundred doughty knights, from Netherlands and from the Nibelungen land, with King Siegmund at their head, to storm the castle, or otherwise avenge, at any risk, their dear lord’s untimely end.

Kriemhild was aroused from her despair to a sense of the danger that these faithful vassals and her beloved husband’s honored father must encounter in the unequal strife they were about entering upon, for the Burgundian heroes numbered at least thirty to their one. So she entreated, even commanded, them to await a more propitious moment.

“Rather remain and mourn with me until the day dawns,” said she, in conclusion, “then help me bury my dead.”

“Dear lady,” cried the heroes, with one voice, “your will shall be done.”

During the long night of sorrow that ensued, knights and ladies, burghers and their wives, mingled their tears with those of the departed warrior's fair wife. Skillful artisans were employed to prepare a coffin of silver and of gold, massive and strong, well bound with iron; and when the morning light appeared, Kriemhild had her dear husband's body placed within it and borne to the minster. She followed, weeping sore, and in her train came those whom she knew to be her friends. The bells tolled dismally, priests chanted the mournful requiem, and the people gathered together from every quarter to do honor to the dead. King Gunther and his vassals, grim Hagen with the rest, joined the band of mourners. It would have been wiser had they not done so. Gunther wept.

"Alas for your woeful loss, dear sister," quoth he. "We must evermore bewail Siegfried's death."

"Why feign a grief you cannot feel?" cried Kriemhild, in her dire distress. "Could you truly mourn his loss, this had never been."

Gunther assured her that neither he nor his were in anywise responsible for this foul deed, and waxed eloquent in his false expressions of sympathy and sorrow.

"Whoe'er in this be guiltless," was Kriemhild's sole reply, "let him now approach the bier in presence of the multitude."

The nobles dared not offer any objections to this test, although they firmly believed that in presence of the blood-stained murderer the wound of the murdered man would bleed afresh. Now it came to pass that as Hagen drew near, the blood oozed slowly

from the wound. Gunther was alarmed at this, and attempted an explanation.

“Listen to the truth, dear sister,” said he. “Robbers slew him. Hagen never did it.”

“These robbers are well known to me,” replied Kriemhild. “Gunther and Hagen, it was you who did this. May God punish you through the hands of Siegfried’s friends.”

One and all the Nibelungen heroes showed themselves in readiness to fall upon the murderers, but a single look from the sorrow-laden lady, who had speedily recovered her self-possession, reminded them that they must bide their time. Kriemhild’s brothers, Gernot and Giselher, the child, now came forward, and gave every evidence of sincerely mourning the dead. They had wept themselves almost blind at tidings of Siegfried’s murder, and now poured tender words of sympathy into their sister’s ear. Alas! no words could assuage the grief of the stricken mourner.

The coffin was deposited in front of the altar within the minster, and there for three long days and nights homage was paid the dead. Priests sang long masses for the repose of the royal warrior’s soul, and throngs of worshipers filled the sacred edifice day and night, weeping and praying for him who was the friend of all. Dame Ute came with her followers to unburden her heavy heart, and old King Siegmund, as he bowed his aged form in woe unspeakable, felt that all joy in life was over for him. At least a hundred masses were sung each day, and throughout the vicinity no child was too small to attend a portion of these. By order of the mourners, many thousand marks were expended for the funeral solemnities,

and treasures were scattered abroad without stint among the poor of the realm.

During all this period Kriemhild had remained by her dead warrior's side, weeping, fasting and praying, and many there were of Siegfried's nearest friends and retainers who watched with her. When the last mass had been solemnized, the last anthem had died away, the coffin lid was closed, the body borne away for burial. Kriemhild's strength now gave way; her attendants were compelled to sprinkle her wan face with cold water from the spring ere they could succeed in leading her to the grave. When the latter was reached, she broke down completely.

“O ye vassals of my Siegfried,” spake the queen, “in mercy grant me one favor. Think of my unutterable woe, and let my eyes once more rest upon his noble face.”

Moved by her piteous entreaties, the pall-bearers paused with their precious burden, and the coffin lid was removed. The poor widow bowed in anguish over all that remained of her lord, took the head between her hands, gazed earnestly into the wan face and covered it with kisses of frantic devotion, amid which consciousness mercifully forsook her. Such a sorrowful farewell had never before been witnessed. Then the coffin lid was replaced, and the hero's body laid in the grave, while fair Kriemhild was gently uplifted from the ground and carried back to the castle, where she lay in a heavy swoon until the next day.

EIGHTEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIEGMUND JOURNEYED HOME AND KRIEMHILD TARRIED BEHIND.

KING SIEGMUND, also, was exhausted with grief, long fasting and loss of sleep. After the earth had closed over his beloved son, like his unhappy daughter-in-law, he swooned away. What wonder that they who were subject to him wistfully turned their thoughts homeward, feeling that they could no longer endure to remain in a land where they had known such grievous wrong? So soon as the bereaved father had, in a measure, recovered from the first shock of his grief, he sought the presence of Siegfried's widowed queen.

"Let us go hence to our own land," said he. "Here we are unwelcome guests, I ween. For your people's foul treachery you shall never suffer, Kriemhild, beloved daughter; dear to my heart you shall ever be for love of my noble son and your child. Once home in our own land, you shall wear the crown and all high honors Siegfried gave you, and they who called him liege will gladly serve you."

Little caring what became of her, yet abhorring the thought of possible contact with her hated enemy, Kriemhild passively permitted preparations for departure to be made. Knights and ladies donned their traveling suits, but just as King Siegmund had signified his readiness to set forth, Kriemhild's mother

became aware of what was about to happen. Deeply pained, the worthy dame hastened to seek her daughter and beseech her to remain at home with her kins-folk.

“Nay, that can scarcely be,” responded the joyless one. “How could I bear to have ever before my eyes him by whom I, poor woman, have been so wronged?”

“Dear sister mine,” said young Giselher, “you should stay here with your mother.”

“I should die of woe if I must see Hagen,” wailed the desolate lady.

“You need never see him, beloved sister,” said the tender brother. “You will be with Giselher, your brother. I will shield and protect you.”

Noble Gernot, also, assured Kriemhild of his affectionate readiness to serve her, reminding her how much better it would be for her in years to come to be with her friends than in the land where she was henceforth but a stranger, and finally, thus urged, she promised to remain.

When this decision became known to the venerable Siegmund, his heart was sore oppressed and right sorrowful was his mood. Most earnestly did he strive to persuade his son’s widow to abide by her first intention, but she told him that she felt it best to accept the counsel of those who were her nearest of kin, which was, not to return unto the Nibelungen land. King Siegmund reproachfully inquired if she thought it best to forsake her child.

“When your son grows,” said he, “he may bring solace to you.”

“Sir Siegmund,” she replied, “I cannot go with

you. I must stay with those who can sorrow with me in my woe. My dear little child I trust to you and these our faithful knights. One day he will be ruler in your land; to your keeping I can safely confide him."

When King Siegmund's retainers and those who had called Siegfried master found that their sovereign lady refused to accompany them home, they set up a most piteous wail of lamentation, and amid this, with heavy heart, the venerable king took leave of the fair and sorrow-laden queen. Fondly kissing her, he bewailed his sorrowful fate.

"Alas, for this high-tide!"—thus did the monarch pour forth his grief. "Never, indeed, did prince and his people suffer such wrong for merry pastime's sake. Kriemhild, farewell, we ride hence poor in friends, nevermore to come again."

"Ay, but we may come again!" cried the Nibelungen heroes, with one voice, "if we but learn who slew our lord. Ready will many be to avenge his death."

Attempting no other leave-takings, they all silently departed from the land. Gernot and Giselher, longing to assure the stricken king and his trusty vassals of their warm friendship and sympathy, followed after them from Worms to the Rhine valley, and lovingly accosted them:

"God in heaven knows that we are innocent of Siegfried's death! We truly mourn his loss," said Sir Germot, and young Giselher insisted upon the departing guests accepting their escort to the confines of the land.

Thus Kriemhild was once more established in

her own home. All who were admitted into her presence dealt tenderly with her, but none could afford her such consolation as Giselher, the child. Haughty Brunhild heard much of the widow's grief and never-ceasing lamentation; but what cared she? She knew not that the day was destined to come when dame Kriemhild would requite woe with woe.

NINETEENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE HOARD CAME TO WORMS.

IN Worms, near the minster, spacious and sumptuous apartments were set apart for the use of the widowed Kriemhild, and there the joyless one was served by faithful margrave Eckewart and his knights, who had followed her to the Netherlands at the time of her marriage. Dame Ute came often with her ladies to visit her; Gernot and Giselher, her well-beloved brothers, often sought her presence; yet her wounded heart was not healed — there seemed to be no comfort for her. With deep devotion she attended the services at the minster; she passed hours by her hero's grave, weeping and praying, and she proved her virtue.

Three years rolled away, and during this time she had spoken never a word to her brother Gunther, nor had her eyes rested upon her arch-enemy, Hagen. The latter began to grow seriously uneasy at his liege lord's remaining so long under the displeasure of one who had such a mighty treasure at her command, and he strenuously advised seeking a reconciliation, in order that there might be some possibility of transferring the Nibelungen hoard to their land. He finally succeeded in moving Gunther to entreat his brothers to bring about this reconciliation.

Thus it came to pass that these valiant brothers went to Kriemhild and made known unto her Gun-

ther's desire to be at peace with her. Bold Gernot assured her that her grief had made her unjust, that the king must be innocent of Siegfried's death, as he had ever declared himself to be; at last he persuaded his sister to promise that she would receive Gunther with kindly greetings and words of forgiveness, whatever dark suspicions must remain buried within her bosom. Hagen she could not be induced to see.

"His hand dealt the blow which robbed me of my lord," she said. "I showed him, myself, the spot where alone steel could harm him. Ah, woe is me!"

Gunther came without delay to pay his respects to Siegfried's widowed queen, and with him came his trustiest friends—Hagen alone not venturing to enter her presence. Kriemhild received them with mournful gentleness, and never was peace cemented with so many tears. Full well did she know where to place blame, and yet she felt ready to extend forgiveness to all but one man.

Ere long it was represented to Kriemhild that the Nibelungen hoard, being her lawful dower, should be in her immediate possession. So little did she now care for worldly matters, that she was very readily induced to dispatch her brothers Gernot and Giselher, with eight thousand men under their command, to remove this wondrous, and, from its earliest origin, mischief-breeding treasure, to Worms. The dwarf, Alberich, was loth to part with it.

"We have no right to withhold it," quoth he to his friends, "for it is, beyond doubt, Queen Kriemhild's dower. Yet never should these bold intruders have it, had we not lost the good Tarnkappe and Siegfried, our lord, who wore it."

Sadly the keeper yielded up his keys, and the work of removal began. Twelve wagons were constantly employed during four days and four nights in conveying the treasure from the mountain side to the barks waiting to bear it over the waves to Worms. Concealed amid the gold and precious stones lay the celebrated wishing-rod. Whosoever had discovered that, knowing its secret, might have become lord of the whole broad earth.

The removal of this treasure rendered Gernot and Giselher lords of the Nibelungen land, and when they sailed hence they bore with them many of the heroes. At Worms, vast towers and chambers were filled with this boundless hoard, which exceeded all the marvels that had ever been heard of in the Burgundian land. Kriemhild was mistress supreme, and her keys she entrusted to her younger brothers alone. With lavish hand she now scattered her costly gifts among rich and poor of the land. Such regal generosity had never been known. Many there were ready to enter into her service, and the stranger knights in vast numbers rallied about her. Then Hagen sought King Gunther, saying:

“A wise man never confides such treasures to woman’s hand. We will come to rue the day we gave her power to make such gifts.”

“The hoard is hers,” said King Gunther. “I made her a solemn vow never to harm her more, and I will abide by it.”

“Let me be the guilty one,” said Hagen.

When the faithful brothers Gernot and Giselher learned that their kinsman Hagen wished to deprive their sister of her lawful possession, they were very

angry, and vowed to shield her from further wrong than she had suffered in their land. Little availed their vows or those of their royal brother, for the sorrow-stricken widow was robbed of her hoard.

The king and his friends pricked forth into the land on an expedition of some import. Hagen alone remained behind at Worms because of the hatred he bore Kriemhild. He managed, through his wile, to gain possession of the queen's keys, and ere his lords had returned, great mischief was accomplished. The hoard had been sunk into the Rhine by Hagen and his followers, all of whom he had compelled to take solemn oaths that they would never reveal to mortal the spot where it lay buried. Since he knew that he would never be permitted to control this matchless treasure for his dear master's benefit, the grim knight had resolved that none other should profit by it.

When the royal brothers returned to court, they were so deeply incensed at what their kinsman had done that he found it wise to withdraw from their presence for a season. As for Kriemhild, she wept bitter tears over the new injury inflicted upon her; it brought back afresh all her heart's woe, and her dames and maidens joined with her in her loud lamentations. Yet small was its loss compared with that of Siegfried, her friend of friends.

After her husband's death, dame Ute had founded, and richly endowed, a princely abbey at Lorsch, between Worms and the Odenwald, and when Siegfried was slain, his faithful widow sent thither lavish stores of gold and precious stones, that masses might be held for the repose of souls.

To a lofty and magnificent retreat she had had pre-

pared hard by the abbey, worthy dame Ute retired in the thirteenth year of her daughter's widowhood. Kriemhild still bewailed her Siegfried's loss; for this she won great praise. Her mother could not bear to leave her alone with her grief.

“Dear daughter mine,” said she, “come with me to Lorsch and cease your weeping.”

But Kriemhild refused to leave her hero's grave, nor would she promise to go with her mother until consent was given her to remove the bones of her beloved to the Lorsch minster. This removal was effected with all honor, and there, to this day, we are told, lies the long coffin with the warrior's remains. Kriemhild was about to follow, but this was not to be. She was detained by new tidings which came over the Rhine, and of which we shall hear anon.

BOOK II.

TWENTIETH ADVENTURE.

HOW KING ETZEL SUED FOR KRIEMHILD'S HAND.

THESE were the days when dame Helke died, and the great Etzel, king of the Huns, bethought him of solacing his own woes by seeking another queen. His friends and vassals had strongly urged him to do so, and especially commended to his favorable consideration a certain proud Burgundian widow, dame Kriemhild by name.

“Ah!” spake the wealthy king. “It were useless to think of her. I am a pagan, she a christian. A wonder must be wrought to bring her here.”

“Perhaps your honored name and your great riches may lead her to overlook the difference of religions,” replied the nobles. “Well would it behoove you to make the trial, for this glorious dame merits the favor of the greatest of kings.”

“Which of you are best acquainted in this kingdom on the Rhine?” asked King Etzel, moved to interest by the words of his friends.

“The noble kings of the land, Gunther, Gernot and Giselher, three brave knights and true, have been well known to me from childhood up,” spake the good Rüdiger of Bechlaren. “For their honor and

their virtue they have won as high repute as did their puissant forefathers."

"Friend, tell me true," quoth the wealthy king, "is she indeed worthy to wear the crown of this great land? And has she truly such beauty as the world attributes to her?"

"For peerless grace and beauty she may vie with my ever-honored lady, dame Helke," was Rüdiger's reply. "Fairer no queen in this broad earth could be. Who chooses her for his bride may well find solace."

"Then, as you love me, dear Rüdiger," cried the king, "woo and win her for me. If Kriemhild becomes mine, I will reward you as best I can. All that you desire of gold, horses and fine raiment shall be freely given you from my treasure-stores, that you and your friends may revel in abundance as ye journey onward."

"Ill would it become me to covet your stores," replied the margrave, wealthy Rüdiger. "Gladly will I bear your message to the Rhine, but my own stores will suffice to equip me and my followers. All that I have is the gift of your hands."

"Heaven prosper your journey," fervently ejaculated King Etzel. "How soon, my friend, do you think to ride hence?"

"Before sallying forth from this land," was the margrave's reply, "I must see to equipping myself and five hundred chosen knights with armor and raiment worthy to appear before the queen. In four-and-twenty days all shall be ready."

Rüdiger dispatched messengers forthwith to Bech-laren, to announce to his high-born margravine, dame

Gotelind, that he was about journeying to a foreign land, in order to seek a bride for King Etzel. Dame Gotelind was very sorrowful at these tidings. Queen Helke had been a kind friend to her, and she dreaded the thought of a new royal mistress. When her husband arrived, however, to take leave of her, and told her who the chosen lady was, she was comforted, for she had heard much in praise of Kriemhild.

In the city of Vienna, Rüdiger had had sundry needful articles prepared for himself and his followers, and after rejoicing in the warm welcome accorded him in his own home, by his wife and fair young daughter, he asked the former to aid him in completing the equipment from the rich garments she always kept ready in her own treasure-stores. This she did with a bounteous hand, winning great praise from her noble husband.

On the seventh day after his arrival at home, all preparations were completed, and Rüdiger, with his five hundred knights, joyously rode forth from the Hunnish land. Their route lay through Bavaria, which was at that time in a thoroughly lawless state; but Rüdiger and his friends, powerful as they were, had little occasion to fear the robbers who infested the land. Within twelve days after leaving Bechlaren they reached the Rhine, and rumors of the approach of foreign knights preceded them to Worms. The host of the Rhine was filled with wonder by the descriptions brought him of the splendor of the approaching strangers, and, as we have known him to do before, sent for Hagen, to ask of him who the knights might be. At first Hagen seemed unable to give definite response, but ere long he descried Rüdiger, and

recognized him at once. Leaving King Gunther to make the most of his astonishment, Hagen hastened out himself, with his friends, to welcome the strangers. As the five hundred doughty knights from the land of the Huns sprang from their horses, they met with a joyful reception.

“Be welcome, all ye knights,” cried Hagen of Tronje, in a loud, clear voice, “most worshipful Vogt of Bechlaren and his hosts.”

The swift Huns were indeed received with honors. The king’s nearest friends all pressed forward to unite their words of welcome with those of Hagen.

“For many a long day,” cried Ortwin of Metz to Rüdiger, “such beloved guests have not been seen within King Gunther’s realm.”

The heroes spoke their thanks for the kindly greeting accorded them, and then permitted themselves to be led directly into the palace. King Gunther awaited their coming in the castle hall, surrounded by many brave men. As they entered his presence, he arose from his seat, and most hearty was the welcome he accorded the distinguished ambassador and his knights. Taking Rüdiger by the hand, he led him forward and seated him beside himself upon the seat of honor. The best wine that the land could afford, as well as excellent mead, was handed round at the king’s command, to refresh the guests. After Gernot, Giselher, Gere, Dankwart and Volker had each given abundant vent to their joy at the unexpected arrival, and Hagen had spoken a private word of reminder into the king’s ear, of the many favors that had been shown the Burgundians, in times past, by King Etzel and his vassals, especially by this

very Rüdiger, King Gunther most courteously inquired to what cause he was indebted for the pleasure of this visit.

“My powerful liege, King Etzel,” said the brave Rüdiger in reply, and he rose to his feet as he spoke, “offers to you and all your kinsmen on the Rhine his truest service. Also, he begs leave to make known unto you his dire distress. His whole land is joyless, for our noble sovereign lady, Helke, the wealthy, is dead. Orphaned by her loss are many princely maidens whom she has trained. Seldom has king's land met with so grievous a woe.”

Gunther expressed his deep sympathy for Etzel's bereavement, and keen appreciation of the attention shown in thus officially announcing it to him. Noble Gernot united with him, and said that he had heard much of the world-renowned beauty and virtue of the deceased. Hagen and others corroborated all that he said.

“Permit me, Sir Gunther,” resumed Rüdiger, addressing himself once more to the king, “to proceed further with my royal master's message. King Etzel, richest of all earthly kings, has been very lonely since dame Helke died. Tidings have latterly reached his ears that your noble sister Kriemhild has lived unwedded since brave Siegfried's death. If this be true, and if you will consent, my master bids me say that dame Helke's crown shall be bestowed upon your sister, in the presence of all the nobles of our land, if she but heed his wooing.”

King Gunther was much flattered by this proposal, and assured the messenger of high estate that his sister would be fulfilling his best wishes if she

should accept. It would be necessary, however, to obtain the lady's own consent, he said; he would consult with her, and make known her answer in the course of the next three days. The guests were then led to the sumptuous apartments that had been prepared for their reception, and were entertained with so much hospitality, that Rüdiger had cause to feel gratified.

After the guests had withdrawn, King Gunther called his friends around him, to advise with them upon the propriety of urging Kriemhild to accept this offer. All were in favor of it except Hagen alone; he vehemently exclaimed:

“If you are wise you will never permit this thing, let Kriemhild be never so willing.”

“And wherefore should I not permit it?” cried Gunther. “She is my own sister, and has been wronged in my land; surely I should not grudge her any honor that might brighten her sad lot?”

Hagen, however, persisted in his objections, taking pains to represent how very dangerous Kriemhild would become to them, should she thus attain so much power. Gernot maintained that there was not the slightest cause for uneasiness upon that score, because of the remoteness of King Etzel's land, and strove to overrule the dissenting voice. Brave Giseler tried to shame Hagen for being willing to interfere with Kriemhild's good fortune, after having already done her so much wrong; but, with dogged perseverance, he of the swift glances never wavered from his point.

“Full sorely will you rue it if she wears dame Helke's crown,” he said, sullenly.

The brothers indignantly refused to listen to him; King Gunther himself, for once, having courage to oppose the grim knight's powerful will. It was agreed to acquaint Kriemhild with the honor awaiting her acceptance. Margrave Gere volunteered to wait upon her with tidings of the embassy, and to urge her to give ear to the proffered suit.

Kriemhild sat alone in her chamber, thinking of her lost Siegfried, when the faithful vassal was announced to her. She received him kindly, as was her wont, but when she found that he had come to talk with her of the wooing of a warrior bold, she turned reproachfully upon him and bade him cease mocking at her grief. When, notwithstanding this, he continued to press the suit on her favorable consideration, she loudly protested against it. Gernot and Giselher, her favorite brothers, came now and lovingly besought her not to wholly refuse the consideration of what might bring her solace, even joy; and finally, although she vowed that never more upon earth would she hearken unto man's wooing, she consented to give audience to King Etzel's high-born messenger. It would please her to receive Rüdiger, she said, because of his virtue, but his message was in vain. So soon as she was left alone, the sorrow-stricken woman burst into fresh weeping and lamentation. The very mention of a new courtship seemed to intensify the faithful widow's grief. Unbounded had been her love, unbounded was her woe.

The next morning, soon after early mass, the noble Rüdiger was ushered into her presence. Kriemhild had made no grand toilette for his reception, as once she would have done; she was clad in weeds of

woe, although rich and gay was the attire of her maidens; but she listened patiently to his eloquent delivery of his royal master's message. When he had concluded, she thus replied:

“No one who truly knew my heart's deep woe, noble Rüdiger, would counsel me to wed another lord. I have lost the noblest, grandest one that ever woman won.”

“What can better still the voice of grief,” spake the valiant man, “than friendly love? Etzel, the glorious king, offers you love without grief, and all the friendliness his heart cherished for Helke, our queen. My gracious master is the richest and noblest of earthly monarchs; twelve kings and thirty princes, all conquered by his might, are subject to him. You will be mistress, besides, of many worthy knights, who served Helke, my sovereign lady, and many beauteous maidens of princely birth.”

“Ah!” cried the sorrowing queen, “how could I ever again become wife of hero? Death hath wrought me such grievous wrong through one I loved, that I must weep and mourn until my end.”

Then Rüdiger waxed eloquent. He described the splendor with which she would be surrounded as King Etzel's queen, pictured the happy, honored, useful life she might lead, and told how eagerly the monarch and his vast hosts of vassals awaited tidings of her reply. Wearied at last with his importunities, Kriemhild besought the knight of Bechlaren to leave her for a season, and come again on the morrow, if he would. When he was gone, she sent for her mother and her dear brother Giselher, and she talked with them of the wooing, and said that weeping alone

became her, nothing more. Young Giselher told her that she should rejoice to be thus chosen by a monarch than whom the world knew none more powerful, begging her not to refuse a union of which, whatever others might say, he most heartily approved. And good old dame Ute said:

“Your brothers all advise it, dear child. Heed your friends; long enough have you lived in sorrow.”

All night long the widowed queen lay awake, full of thought, taking counsel with her own heart as to her best course of action, and humbly imploring the all-powerful God to guide her aright. Could it be other than sin, should she, a christian woman, wed a pagan? she queried. Would she not justly merit the blame of the world by so doing? When Rüdiger came to her in the morning, after they had all attended mass, he found her still unwilling to give favorable reply to his master's suit. The wealthy margrave repeated all his arguments of the previous day, adding much besides, without arousing the slightest interest, but he struck the right chord at last by the following insinuating remark:

“You do wrong, O queen, to deprive the world of the sight of so much beauty by wasting your days alone in vain mourning. Accept my master's offer, become his beloved and honored queen, and you will have at your command great power. Were there of Hunnish knights but myself and my vassals alone, you might be well avenged had any one ever done you harm.”

A lurid gleam of hope, after her long years of darkness, broke on Kriemhild as she listened to these

words, and all the pent-up hatred and lust for revenge surged madly in her heart. Almost vehemently she turned upon Rüdiger and made him swear her a solemn oath that wherever and however she might call upon him for aid, he would unhesitatingly serve her. When he had fully satisfied her upon this score, all doubts but one were removed from her mind.

“Did I not know that Etzel was a pagan,” cried she, “I should gladly go with you and take him for my lord.”

“Let not that deter you,” rejoined Rüdiger. “There are as many christians as pagans at King Etzel’s court,—I am a christian myself. As for my noble master, he was once baptized, but he went back again to the old faith. You can easily lead him, through your love, to turn his thoughts once more to the true God.”

Thereupon Kriemhild ceased to offer further objections, and allowed herself to be persuaded into making immediate preparations for departure. She asked who of the nobles would accompany her, and Eckenwart offered his services, at once gathering together his followers to make arrangements for the journey. As for the sorrowful bride herself, she was now too busy to brood over the past. She had to superintend the overlooking of the vast court wardrobe and jewels that had so long remained locked away from her sight, select suitable articles from them for her own outfit and that of her attendants, and order new garments made. All this fully occupied twelve days, and then Kriemhild determined to distribute among Rüdiger’s people the gold which had yet remained in her possession after Hagen had had the

Nibelungen hoard sunk in the Rhine. Upon being apprised of this, the knight of Tronje made such stir about it that the matter finally came to Rüdiger's ears. This noble champion immediately sought audience with the queen, and thus accosted her:

"What care you for this gold, all-worshipful king's daughter? In King Etzel's land such stores will be placed at your command that should you distribute them with ever so lavish a hand you could never exhaust them."

"Most noble Rüdiger," replied the queen, "never more can such treasures be mine as those of which Hagen has already despoiled me."

The matter was amicably settled, however, and Kriemhild contented herself with dedicating the gold contained in twelve coffers, which had remained in charge of some of her maidens since the good old days, to having masses sung for the repose of her departed Siegfried's soul. This Rüdiger viewed as a token of highest fidelity.

Kriemhild and her maidens bade a tearful farewell to their friends, and then were ready to follow the strangers. Gunther accompanied his sister to the city gates, while Gernot, Giselher, and many of their most faithful friends, continued onward as far as the banks of the Danube. When, finally, they were obliged to turn back, they took an affectionate leave of Etzel's bride, heartily wishing her God-speed upon her journey, and in her new life.

After crossing the Danube, messengers were sent on in advance to announce to King Etzel the success of Rüdiger's mission, and the approach of the queen. So swiftly did they ride forward that they

reached the court long in advance of the approaching retinue; and when they announced the glad tidings, King Etzel's grief and mourning vanished before the rapture that now filled his heart. He rewarded the delighted bearers of the good tidings with so lavish a hand that there was little likelihood of their ever experiencing want so long as they lived.

TWENTY-FIRST ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD JOURNEYED TO THE LAND OF THE HUNS.

AFTER crossing the Danube, dame Kriemhild and her retinue passed through Bavaria, and speedily reached the city of Passau, situated at the junction of the Inn and the Danube. Here dwelt dame Ute's brother, bishop Pilgerin. The good bishop was overjoyed when he learned that his beloved sister's child was without his gates, hastened out with his followers to greet her, conducted her and her attendants into his palace, and provided for them a most sumptuous repast. He insisted upon their accepting his hospitality for several days, and when he found that it was impossible to persuade them to do so, he resolved to accompany his dear niece some distance upon her way.

From point to point, as they advanced onward, new escorts were added to their numbers, until, finally, so large a force was at their command that Kriemhild had little cause to fear the bands of robbers bold who infested Bavaria. Just beyond the town of Everdingen, upon the banks of the Enns, they found an encampment of tents in a broad field, and every evidence of preparations for a festal reception. This was the work of Gotelind, who had been warned by her husband of the royal guest's approach, and was there herself to meet her. The

vogt of Bechlaren rode joyfully forward to accost his wife, who was relieved of much anxiety at sight of him. When dame Kriemhild saw the margravine, she lost no time in requesting to be presented to her, and it did the old bishop's heart good to watch the welcome accorded his sister's child by lovely Gotelind. This noble lady kissed her guest upon the lips, and accosted her with loving words.

“Most happy am I, dear lady,” cried she, “that my eyes have beheld you in this land. No greater pleasure could be mine!”

“Now God reward you, most noble Gotelind!” said Kriemhild. “May good betide you from my coming.”

Unclouded by thoughts of the events which must befall them in the days to come, they seated themselves in state upon the clover, and discoursed right merrily. The travelers rested in this place all day and all night, and the following morning journeyed onward to Bechlaren, where a brilliant reception awaited Kriemhild. The windows of all the houses in the town were thrown wide open, and were crowded with spectators, all eager to behold the expected guests. The vogt of Bechlaren's young daughter, Dietelind, sallied forth with her maidens to welcome the honored guest and conduct her into the palace.

Kriemhild's spirits were greatly heightened by the attentions bestowed upon her. Had she all the treasures that were once at her command, she would have been very lavish of her gifts to those around her. As it was, she dealt out large shares of the personal possessions she carried with her. Young

Ditelind received from her twelve bracelets of great value, and several of the finest garments that she had brought with her into King Etzel's land. The margravine, in her turn, showered costly gifts on dame Kriemhild's ladies, and the knights from the Rhine. At parting, Dietelind offered to follow her future mistress to court as maid of honor, and Kriemhild was right heartily glad of this proof of affection.

What further betided the strangers in margrave Rüdiger's palace is not known, yet certain it is that both knights and ladies were loth to leave it, when they found that they were expected to hasten onward without long delay. The leave-takings on all sides were most friendly, then the guests mounted their prancing horses and rode away. In the town of Medelick (now called Molk), costly wine was offered the guests as they passed through the streets. The lord of the place, Astold by name, directed them by which route to further pursue their journey. Down the Danube banks, as he told them, they went, until they came to the town of Mautaren. Here the bishop of Passau parted from his niece, bidding her God-speed, and hoping that she might rise to such high honors, in her new home, as dame Helke had attained. His wishes were more than fulfilled, as we shall soon see.

In a short time the guests reached the Traisem. Here the monarch of the Huns had a stronghold called Traisenmauer, where Queen Helke had frequently tarried of yore, dispensing blessings around her. This stronghold was now prepared for Kriemhild's reception, and here the queen, with her reti-

nue, tarried until the fourth day. Here she had a fine opportunity of becoming acquainted with many of her future husband's vassals, and was surprised at the noble courtesy and gentle kindliness displayed in this heathen land.

TWENTY-SECOND ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD WAS RECEIVED BY THE HUNS.

THE further Kriemhild progressed upon her journey after leaving Traisenmauer, the more thoroughly she became convinced that she was in a great and powerful kingdom. As the news of her advance spread, knights and warriors put spurs to their horses and hastened from every quarter through Austria,—the highways were clouded with dust. Knights of divers aspects and divers tongues, with sundry styles of clothing and sundry kinds of weapons; Russians, Greeks, Poles, and Wallachians,—princes as well as inferior nobles,—all came to pay homage to their sovereign lady. The wild Peschenegen and the champions from the land of Kiow, dashed onward with lightning speed, often sending arrows whizzing into the air with sure aim, and bringing down birds upon the wing, to the great astonishment of all beholders.

There is a city on the Danube, in Austria, called Tulna. Here Kriemhild was apprised of her new lord's approach. King Etzel had come out to meet his bride in regal state. He was preceded by many vassals whose sole desire was to behold their queen. First came Ramung, duke of Wallachia, with seven hundred men. Like the swift flight of wild birds was their approach. These were followed by prince Giebecke, with his princely hosts, and Hornbog, the

swift, with a thousand men, all of whose horses were prancing and pirouetting according to the custom of the land. Also were seen bold Hawart, the Dane, and nimble Iring, who was known to be without guile; Irnfried, of Thuringia, a most excellent knight, with twelve hundred followers; and Blödel, King Etzel's brother, from the land of the Huns, with three thousand men. In all, four and twenty princes, every one wealthy and of high estate, had ridden forth with their liege lord to do honor to his bride, and after these came King Etzel himself, accompanied by Sir Dietrich of Bern, or Verona, as this place is now called, with his Amulungen hosts.

The noble Rüdiger had instructed Kriemhild as to the course of action she would be expected to pursue in conformity with the customs of the land. Etzel's vassals were not upon an equal footing, he told her; upon some she must bestow the kiss of greeting, others she must merely smile kindly upon. Etzel sprang from his horse and came joyfully forward to greet the royal dame, followed by many a brave warrior. As for Kriemhild, she advanced with her usual sweetness and dignity, two mighty princes, as is well known, acting as her train-bearers. She graciously returned the noble sovereign's kiss of welcome, and so brilliant did she appear as she did so, that many a witness declared that dame Helke could never have been more beautiful than this, their new liege lady. The king's brother, Blödel, stood near at hand; him Rüdiger counseled her to kiss, next drawing her attention to King Giebecke and Sir Dietrich. In all, Etzel's queen kissed twelve noble knights, smiling sweetly her greetings to many others.

While this formal reception was taking place, feats of chivalry were being displayed on every side. Spears flew through the air, many a shield was battered in the joustings. Christians and pagans alike added their share to the universal merrymaking. In the vicinity there had been erected a superb pavilion. To this King Etzel now led Kriemhild, and the words that he spoke to her, as he sat there by her side, holding her lily-white hand, have never been recorded. Tents were pitched all over the broad fields for the accommodation of the guests. After a sumptuous repast, they rested until morning dawned, Kriemhild, of course, having awarded to her the most magnificent tent of all.

The next morning, Kriemhild and Etzel rode side by side into the city of Vienna, where their nuptials were celebrated with great splendor. The city was so crowded that the houses could not contain all the strangers who flocked in from every direction, and many were obliged to seek shelter without the city gates. The wedding festivities began at Whitsuntide and lasted seventeen days. Legendary lore makes mention of no other king whose nuptials could compare in regal state with these. Kriemhild was forced to admit that, rich as Siegfried had been in treasure stores, he had neither so many nor such mighty vassals in his service as had King Etzel. And yet the poor lady was very sorrowful; her thoughts were ever wandering back to the happiness she had enjoyed with her beloved Siegfried, and which could never again be hers, and she wept in secret.

On the eighteenth day, King Etzel and his noble queen took their departure from Vienna. King

Etzel felt very light of heart as he led home his beauteous and honored bride. At the town of Misenburg they embarked on vessels which were to bring them to their journey's end. So vast a fleet was required for the transport of the royal party, that from a short distance the Danube appeared to be one mass of men and horses. Arrived at Etzlenburg, new honors awaited dame Kriemhild. She was welcomed with every manifestation of rejoicing, and found seven kings' daughters in readiness to serve her, with Dietrich's betrothed, Herrat, the daughter of Queen Helke's sister and King Nentwine, at their head.

From the wardrobe and jewel stores she had brought with her from the Rhine, Kriemhild dealt out gifts with so lavish a hand that the people began to wonder whether she really had been despoiled of such vast treasures as had been said. Very soon her generosity, her affability, her virtue and her rare beauty, won her so high repute that she came to be even more honored and beloved than had been her predecessor, dame Helke. Idolized by King Etzel and his people, her days passed in the harmonious accomplishment of much good, and she never ceased judiciously dispensing the treasures her new lord had placed at her disposal.

TWENTY-THIRD ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD THOUGHT OF AVENGING HER WRONGS.

IN these high honors time sped on until the seventh year. During this period a son was born unto the royal pair, and Kriemhild gained the king's consent to have him baptized according to christian rites. Ortlieb, the infant, was christened, and the whole land was filled with rejoicings at his birth, while the happy father, King Etzel, considered that now life's greatest joys were his.

With the increasing years Kriemhild became more and more beloved by her husband's people, foreigners and native citizens alike declaring that king's land had never possessed sovereign lady of such lofty virtue. She had given great satisfaction in preserving the customs and the court etiquette instituted by Queen Helke, in which she had taken pains to have herself instructed by that lady's faithful maiden, Herrat, and she strove in every way to consult the wishes of her people. Not a single enemy did she have throughout the broad realm, and every one of the twelve kings, and manifold princes and nobles who served her at court, were her friends, as she knew full well.

Notwithstanding all this, she never forgot her woes nor the wrongs that had been done her at home. In her heart of hearts she was constantly recurring to the joys and honors that had been hers

in the Nibelungen land, and wondering whether harm would not befall Hagen because his hand had wrought Siegfried's death. "It might well be so," she thought to herself, "if I could bring him to this land." One night the foul fiend tempted her in her dreams. She thought she saw her brothers at King Etzel's court, and her great delight at seeing her loving Giselher and Gernot was swallowed up in the grim satisfaction she experienced in knowing that her arch-enemy Hagen was of the number, and that he was wholly in her power.

When she awoke, she found it impossible to shake off the impression made by this dream, and it haunted her by day and by night. Amid her gloomy broodings, her old aversion to having a pagan for a husband rose uppermost in her mind, and feeling that but for Hagen and her brother Gunther, she had never married King Etzel, her hatred grew. She now thought of little else than schemes of vengeance, and concluded that the time had come when she might with impunity work her will. Finally she determined to ask her lord to invite her brothers to visit her, knowing that only thus could she hope to lure Hagen into her snares; and once when Etzel was caressing her in fond mood she thus broached the subject:

"My well-beloved lord, I have a boon that I would ask of you to grant me in token of your love."

"Ask what you will," spake the wealthy king,—and unsuspecting was his mood,—"nothing can be greater than you deserve at my hands, and who can resist Kriemhild's will?" .

"You know as well as I," then said the queen, "that I have friends of high estate. It grieves me sorely that they never visit me. To all people I must appear as one without friends."

"Beloved wife," said King Etzel, "were not their home so far away, I should invite hither to my land all whom you would gladly see."

"Would you prove your truth, my lord," said she, rejoiced to know his will, "you would send messengers at once to Worms, in order to make known to my friends how much I long to see them. Many a noble knight and good would then journey here without delay."

"As you command so let it be done," cried the king. "You cannot desire to see noble Ute's sons more than I do. It has ever deeply grieved me that they were so far away from us, and such strangers."

Forthwith the king summoned his minstrels, Werbel and Schwemmel, and gave them orders to equip themselves and their followers in a manner worthy of the messengers of so great a monarch, and repair to Worms to invite the Burgundian kings and their vassals to a grand high-tide to be held the following summer solstice at Etzlenburg. Kriemhild had a private interview with the minstrels before they departed, and charged them with many messages for her friends.

"Admit to no one," said she, "that you have ever seen me in sorrowful mood. Carry my tender greetings to my kinsfolk; implore them in my name to heed the king's behest. Were I a knight, I should often cross the Rhine, so greatly do I desire to see

them. Tell my noble brother Gernot that no one can love him more than I, and bid young Giselher remember that he has never wronged me. To my noble mother say what honors surround me here; and above all things, let not Hagen of Tronje tarry behind, his lords will need him who has known the way to the Huns from childhood up."

The messengers could not in the least conjecture why she made such a point of not having Hagen left behind. Alas! they soon knew it to their grief.

TWENTY-FOURTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE MINSTRELS DELIVERED KING ETZEL'S INVITATION.

WERBEL and Schwemmel rode out from the land of the Huns with four-and-twenty brave knights, all in glittering array. They paused for a season at Bechlaren, where they met with much kindness. Rüdiger, Gotelind, and their daughter, charged them with many happy greetings for their friends in Rhineland. At Passau, Werbel, the swift, sought out bishop Pilgerin. The good old man was overjoyed when they told him of their errand to the Rhine. He said that it would be a glad day for him when his eyes should behold his sister's sons, and he showered his gold freely upon the messengers. Already these had been laden with costly gifts at Bechlaren.

These brave minstrels pricked safely through their journey, Etzel's powerful name protecting them from the assaults of the marauding bands of the countries through which they passed. Within twelve days they reached Worms, and word was brought to Gunther of the arrival of foreign knights. The lord of Rhineland was greatly perplexed to know who these new-comers might be. No one could give answer to his inquiries until well-informed Hagen drew near, and speedily recognized King Etzel's messengers. Kriemhild had doubtless sent them, the knight said, and for their master's sake they must be well received. So orders

were issued to make suitable arrangements for the entertainment of the guests, and to lead them forth into the presence of the king. These princely minstrels, however, requested to be permitted to change their attire before heeding the latter summons, for magnificently as they were clad, they were unwilling to be presented at court in their traveling garments. They found these, in fact, only worthy to bestow on the needy at court.

When, finally, the messengers entered the hall where King Gunther sat surrounded by his nobles, Hagen sprang from his seat to meet them and bring them forward to present them to the king.

“Welcome, most noble minstrels and ye followers of King Etzel’s worthy vassals!” cried King Gunther. “Wherefore hath the king of the Huns sent you hither to the Burgundian land?”

“My well-beloved master proffers his best services to you,” responded Werbel, “as also does Kriemhild, your sister. In token of their friendship have they sent us hither to your land.”

“Verily,” spake the host of the Rhine, “these tidings rejoice me. But tell me, I pray you, how is King Etzel, and how fares it with Kriemhild, my sister, in the land of the Huns?”

“Better have crowned heads never enjoyed their lives than this royal pair,” was the spokesman’s ready reply. “As for your sister, our noble queen, she is worshiped in our land alike by monarch and by people, and she has no wish ungratified.”

King Gunther was pleased with this cheering intelligence. Sundry doubts which had troubled his mind were lulled to rest by it. Gernot and Gisel-

her, who now entered the hall, were overjoyed at the opportunity of hearing such good tidings. The latter, in especial, plied the worthy minstrels with manifold questions concerning Kriemhild. Schwemmel delivered the queen's message, adding that no words of his could give adequate expression to the affectionate greetings she had charged him with. Then turning to King Gunther he delivered King Etzel's invitation, and told how urgently Kriemhild besought her dear brothers to accept it in token of their love for her. Gunther marveled greatly at this invitation, and, feeling that it required especial consideration, he dismissed the guests, with a promise to make known to them his answer upon the seventh day.

Instead of resting, as they had now an opportunity of doing, the weary knights begged to be permitted to pay their respects to dame Ute. Giselher led them into the noble lady's presence, and she received them with a beaming countenance, so rejoiced was she to hear tidings of her child. They gave her, as Kriemhild had bidden them, only cheering words, and made the mother's heart glad with the loving greetings they bore her. But when they told her of the invitation and besought her to accompany her sons, she sorrowfully shook her head, saying that much as she longed to behold her daughter, it would be out of the question for her to undertake so long a journey.

Meanwhile King Gunther had assembled together his brothers and all the nobles of the realm to consult with them upon the propriety of accepting King Etzel's invitation. All were in favor of so doing except Hagen alone,—his wrath kindled at the mere mention of such a thing.

“We have every cause to fear Kriemhild,” said he, “and should be ever on our guard. You surely have not forgotten what was done her here! When I warned you against letting her attain her present power, you said King Etzel’s land was too far distant for intercourse, and now you talk of journeying to it yourself.”

“My sister’s anger was wholly at an end when she left us,” rejoined Gunther, the king. “She took a kindly leave of us all but you. Me she kissed right lovingly.”

“Be not deceived, whatever these Hunnish messengers may say,” said Hagen. “If you put faith in King Etzel’s queen, you will lose with your honor your lives.”

“You may have good reason to fear death in the Hunnish realm, but did we therefore avoid our sister we were wrong,” said Gernot to Hagen; and young Giselher added:

“Since you are so conscious of guilt, uncle Hagen, it were well for you to stay at home, only you would do well not to expect others to do so.”

“Would that none among you had more fear than I,” cried the knight of Tronje, hotly. “If go you must, I will ride with you foremost into King Etzel’s land.”

“If you will not hearken unto Hagen’s counsel, my lord,” suddenly exclaimed Rumold, the steward, “give ear, I pray you, to a word of warning from your trusty Rumold. Stay at home, I implore you, and leave Kriemhild to the sole possession of King Etzel. Wherefore should you journey to a foreign land, and endure all the hardships you must encoun-

ter upon the way? Nowhere in the world can you fare better than here. You are safe, in these your broad realms, from the snares of your enemies; you are clothed sumptuously every day; you eat excellent viands and drink of the most costly German wines. What care you for King Etzel's gay high-tide? You can have as much pastime as heart can desire at home among your friends. Decline this invitation, I entreat you. This is your Rumold's advice."

"No, indeed we will not remain at home," said Gernot. "Since my sister and the mighty King Etzel honor us with so friendly an invitation, wherefore should we not accept it? Let those who desire not the journey remain at home."

Upon this Rumold spoke up very promptly, and said that he would gladly profit by the privilege implied in the last words. Ortwin united in this decision, as also did many other worthy knights. They hoped that the force of their example might induce the others to remain at home, and knew that even should this fail, it would be well for some trusty knights to be left to take care of the land during the absence of its lords. King Gunther was as bent upon accepting the invitation as were his brothers, and was not a little vexed with the persistent warnings given him.

"Let not your displeasure prevent you from hearkening unto what I now must say," said Hagen, cutting short all further parley. "In faith and truth I warn you to ride well armed into the land of the Huns, if you would in safety go. Send for all your warriors, for every trusty vassal and every valiant friend. From all of these I will choose one thousand

of the best, that you may have nothing to fear from Kriemhild's wiles."

"That counsel will I heed," the king at once replied.

Throughout his lands he dispatched messengers far and wide, and ere long three thousand knights or more came proudly riding into Worms. They thought not then of the woe that must betide them, and many were the good knights that the king found right willing to join him. Dankwart, with eighty warriors, came at his brother Hagen's call in full knightly state; the well appointed band had brought with them harness and raiment sufficient. Hardy Volker and thirty of his men of might came also in readiness for the journey, all clad in such apparel as well a king might wear. This Volker, be it remembered, was a high-born warrior, who had many good knights for vassals in Burgundy. He was a minstrel as well as a warrior, and for playing on the viol or fiddle, was styled the fiddler. From all these Hagen chose one thousand knights, whom he knew to be valiant men and true, and whose worth he had often seen tried in grim battle. None could deny their rare prowess. All who lacked suitable horses or raiment were bountifully supplied.

Meanwhile Werbel and Schwemmel were growing sorely impatient at the long delay, and began seriously to fear their lord's displeasure. Gunther would have given them their answer, and dismissed them as soon as his own unalterable decision was formed, but Hagen had advised him not to do so by any means until a week before they were ready to start themselves into King Etzel's land. With all her undoubted thirst for

vengeance, the warrior said, Kriemhild would make ill use of any time granted her to prepare for their reception. Saddles, shields, and all the proud array that each was to bring into the land of the Huns, were finally prepared for many a champion, and the messengers were then summoned to court. Sir Gernot acted as spokesman.

“The king will follow royal Etzel’s bidding,” said he. “Fain are we to speed us to his gay high-tide, and see our sister once more; she may depend on this.”

King Gunther then gave them a permission which had not yet been granted. If they wished to visit dame Brunhild, he told them, they might seek her bower with his free consent. Hereupon, much to the disappointment of the minstrels, Sir Volker interposed, knowing full well that he was doing his lady’s pleasure.

“Just now my lady Brunhild is not inclined to receive strangers,” quoth he. “Wait but till to-morrow, and you shall see her.”

But the minstrels had already remained so long that they said they dare not tarry longer, greatly as they were chagrined to miss seeing the noble queen. Then, in his gracious fashion, the king commanded gold from his good stores to be brought forth, spread on massive bucklers, to be distributed among the messengers and their attendants. Giselher, Gernot, Gere and Ortwin also made ready to shower rich gifts upon them, but these dare not accept them, through terror of their lord’s disapproval.

“Sir king,” said Werbel, “your presents must remain in your country; we durst not take them with

us. Our king has forbidden us to accept gifts; besides, we have little need."

The landlord of the Rhine was deeply chagrined that they should refuse such gifts from his royal store. Still he constrained them to take a portion of his gold into Etzel's land, for his sake. The minstrels asked if they might have an audience with Queen Ute ere they set out, and young Giselher promptly brought them into his mother's presence. The lady sent word by them to her daughter that she was overjoyed to hear of all her honors; and she lavished her gold upon them, both for the sake of the child she loved full well, and also for King Etzel's sake. She proffered it so warmly that they felt constrained to accept.

Taking leave of every warrior and lady, the messengers then rode away. Sir Gernot sent with them, as far as Swabia, an escort of his knights to guard them from harm. Thenceforward the power of Etzel's name insured them a peaceful journey. Thus they pricked onward with fiery speed, announcing everywhere the approach of the Burgundians. At the good town Gran, King Etzel and his queen awaited them. When the success of the embassy was made known, the king was rejoiced, while Kriemhild swam in rapture. She sent for the minstrels to her bower, and questioned them closely as to all that had transpired. Last of all, she inquired what Hagen had said when he heard the tidings.

"Little did grim Hagen utter but words of gloom," was the reply. "This journey to our land he termed a jaunt to death. Nevertheless, he is coming with your brothers. The valiant minstrel, Volker, agreed

also to ride with them ; who else besides we could not surely learn."

"Well could I have dispensed with Volker," said the queen ; "Hagen is the one whom most I desire to see,—he is a man of courage high."

Then Kriemhild hastened to where King Etzel sat, and thus kindly did she accost him :

"My dear lord, how pleases you the tidings ? My heart's most ardent wishes shall now be fulfilled."

"Your wishes are mine," the king replied ; "never has my heart been more joyful when it pleased my own good kinsmen to hie them into my land."

The king's officials bestirred themselves to furnish palace as well as hall with fitting seats for the dear guests now approaching to the merry high-tide. Much cause came therefrom for bitter weeping.

TWENTY-FIFTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE BURGUNDIAN LORDS JOURNEYED TO THE LAND OF THE HUNS.

NEVER before were such well-appointed hosts known to ride into king's country as those prepared by the lord of the Rhine lands to accompany him to King Etzel's distant realm. A thousand and threescore knights, besides nine thousand esquires, were appareled and equipped as became the liegemen of their sovereign master. As their equipment was being carried through the palace court at Worms, a venerable bishop spake thus to the most noble dame Ute:

"Our friends are making ready to journey to the high-tide. May God preserve them!"

Thereupon Ute sent for her sons, and she said:

"Far better rest at home, ye daring heroes. Last night I dreamed of ghostly need. Methought that all the birds in this our realm were dead."

"Whoso heedeth dreams," spake Hagen, who had followed his lords into their mother's presence, "knoweth not how to win honor. Take leave, my noble masters, and let us forward. We shall ride hence full gladly into King Etzel's land."

Thus did Hagen at last indorse the journey which soon he had cause to bitterly rue, and which he never would have countenanced but for the scorn that Sir Gernot had so wantonly cast upon him.

Bidding farewell to the mother queen, the knights hastened down to the Rhine-banks, where the boats were floating ready to bear the warrior-band across the stream. The grass on the opposite side of the Rhine was dotted over with tents and proud pavilions. Thus far upon the journey did Queen Brunhild and her ladies accompany their lords, and as it was already eventide when the spot was reached, they rested here for the night. When sound of trumpet and flute at dawn of day aroused them from their slumbers, there was unwittingly spoken a last farewell.

Dame Ute's noble sons had a man at their court who was alike noble and brave. Rumold was his name. Before the forces were ready to start he drew the king aside.

“Alas, for this journey!” quoth he. “It fills my heart with grief that I cannot persuade you for your good. To whom do you commit your lands and your people?”

“My whole realm I confide to your charge,” rejoined the king. “Care well for my sweet boy, and do not fail to see to the comfort of my royal wife and all the noble ladies whom we leave behind. Console, I pray you, whomsoever you find weeping. Harm can never befall us at the hands of Kriemhild, King Etzel's queen.”

The steeds were standing ready for the king and his liegemen. With tenderest kisses each gallant horseman took leave of his lady who was shortly doomed to bewail his loss. Sobs and lamentations now rang through the air; the stoutest heart quailed with a dreary, dark foreboding. Queen Brunhild

stood holding her young son by the hand; nor could she restrain herself at the very last moment from giving vent to her overburdened heart.

“Oh, wherefore will you render us both desolate?” wailed she. “Remain for love of us.”

“Wife, you should not sorrow thus because of this step I take,” the king called back, ere he rode from sight. “Be of good cheer; soon will we return to you again.”

The bold lords of the Rhine rode forth in gallant splendor with their one thousand Nibelungen knights; and albeit faith was yet weak in those days, they had with them a chaplain. Men and women ran hurrying to and fro from all parts of the country to see them, and many were the tears shed. When the river Main was reached, they followed its banks through eastern Frankland, which was subject to King Gunther. Their steps were guided by Hagen of Tronje, who well knew the route. Their marshal was Dankwart, the stout Burgundian knight. As they pricked onward to Schwanfeld, the bright and lordly throng proved by their bearing how well they deserved their knightly fame.

On the twelfth morning the Nibelungen hosts, for so it must be remembered, since their capture of Siegfried’s land and treasures, the Burgundians had been called, reached the Danube. The lord of Tronje was the knight best trusted by them. This fear-defying champion rode on a space in advance of the rest, alighted on the strand, and secured his horse to a tree. The river was swollen, and there was never a boat in sight. Many a good knight sprang from his saddle, and stood wistfully eying the stream.

“Good king of the Rhine,” cried Hagen, “much mischief may befall you here. The tide is strong and furious; many a good knight may be lost in the attempt to cross the waters.”

“For your valor’s sake, friend Hagen,” began the king, “increase not our dismay. Seek a ford higher up the stream, I implore you, where we may cross in safety.”

So Hagen, carelessly observing that he held not his own life so cheap as to wish to leave it in these deep waters, bid the warriors rest beside the stream while he sought a ferryman along the banks to bear them over into Gelfrat’s land. The sturdy champion was well armed; he bore a glittering and mighty shield; his helmet was well tempered, and burnished bright; his keen-edged broadsword hung from a baldric over his stout coat-of-mail. In this guise he went in quest of a ferryman. Suddenly he heard a splashing of water, and looking up discovered that the sound came from certain wise women, who were mer-women of the Danube. They skimmed aloof upon the waters like white swans when they espied Hagen, who stole warily up and seized upon their raiment. One of them, named Hadburg, cried out to him:

“Sir Hagen, noble knight, give us back our raiment, and we will tell you what will betide you on this march to the land of the Huns.”

“Agreed,” said Hagen. “Let me hear.”

“You do well to ride into King Etzel’s land,” spake she. “I pledge you my faith that never have such honors been accorded stranger knight in foreign land as you shall win.”

Well pleased with this favorable prophecy, Hagen dallied not in returning their raiment. Hereupon they speedily donned their wondrous attire, and another of them, Siegelind by name, thus addressed deluded Hagen :

“I would warn you, Hagen, son of Aldrian. My cousin has lied to get her raiment back. Turn while there is time for safety, for yon noble knights are bidden to the land of the Huns only that ye may all perish there.”

“Vain is your cheating,” responded Hagen there-to. “Fierce though be the hatred one may bear, it were impossible that all of us should be slain.”

“Yet so it needs must be,” outspake the wild merwoman. “None of you shall ever again behold your own country, save the king’s chaplain. He alone shall return in safety to Worms. This is well known unto me.”

“Such tidings as these my masters would scorn to hear,” angrily rejoined the knight of Tronje, frown-ing darkly, for his wrath did fiercely swell. “Now show me how this stream may be crossed, thou wise, all-knowing woman.”

Thereupon, seeing him bent upon his ruin, she told him that there was a ferry-house farther up the river, on the other shore, where dwelt a ferryman, and none other besides. As the knight was about moving off, the first spokeswoman called after him with still further directions. The ferryman, she said, was a man of fiercest mood, and must be dealt with cautiously. Being a friend of Sir Gel-frat, brother to the ruling margrave, and a great lord in Bavaria, he had much power in the land,

and it was indeed worth the while of stranger knight to win his favor. If nothing else would serve to bring him across the river with his boat, it might be done by Hagen's announcing himself as Amelrich, a knight of birth and fame, whom a late feud had driven from the land. The ferryman would make good speed, the merwoman said, when once he heard this name.

Bowing his thanks to the wise women, Sir Hagen strode off in gloomy silence. He found everything as they had predicted. The boatman, heedless of all shouting and offers of gold, bestirred himself at the name of Amelrich. Let it be recorded, however, that the shouting of this name was accompanied by the act of lifting high on the sword a glittering golden armlet of great price. Now, wealthy as the ferryman was, and seldom as he deigned to accept a fare, he was not free from a certain hankering after pelf, and this bait was alluring. Nevertheless, he waxed furious when, after rowing across the stream with sinewy might, he found not the man whom he expected to see.

“Your name may be Amelrich,” quoth he, “but are not he whom I expected to find. Well know I him, for he is my brother. You have deceived me, so must remain on this side.”

“Nay, say not so, for heaven’s sake,” cried Hagen, springing into the boat, “accept my gold in kindly mood, and ferry me with my brave friends and their steeds across the river.”

“That will I never do,” was the grim reply. “My good lords have already too many deadly foes around them, hence I never put strangers into their

land. If you love your life, essay not to cross this stream."

With these words he caught up an oar and dealt such a blow on the head of his proud unbidden guest that the hero staggered and sank on his knees. Such wrathful boatman had he of Tronje never seen, and quickly recovering himself, he grasped his weapon, smote off the head of this sturdy wight and cast him overboard. At this moment a strong current whirled the boat out into the stream, and much weariness overcame Hagen ere he succeeded in turning it shoreward. He rowed so stoutly, indeed, that the strong oar broke asunder in his hand. Nothing daunted, the sturdy knight spliced this with a slender thong from his buckler, and speedily reached the strand where his lords awaited him. When King Gunther saw the blood streaming from the boat, he exclaimed:

"What have you done with the boatman, friend Hagen? Has your powerful hand bereft him of life?"

"I found the boat as you see it now, moored to a drooping willow," replied Hagen, promptly; "I have seen no ferryman to-day. And so, you see, harm has befallen no one by my hand."

"Ah! woe is me!" cried sturdy Gernot. "This day must I bewail my true friend's death. He was ever a ready steersman; but now we tarry here beside the shore, and know not how we may come over."

"Ye sturdy esquires," cried Hagen, in a loud voice, "bring hither your gear. Time was when I was deemed the best steersman on the Rhine, I will pilot you over to Gelfrat's land."

The bark was capacious and strong, it was capable of carrying five hundred or more with ease on each passage, besides large stores of valuables. With unflagging energy he of Tronje plied it to and fro until the one thousand knights, his own sixty retainers and the nine thousand yeomen were safely ferried over into the unknown land. In order to expedite the passage, the horses were made to swim across the Danube. Some of them were borne by the tide down the stream, but after desperate struggling all finally succeeded in reaching the opposite shore.

All the while Hagen was fiercely brooding over the wild merwoman's predictions, which had even exceeded his own gloomy forebodings. Suddenly his eye fell on the chaplain, who alone of all of them was to return, and turning on him with wrathful fury, he hurled him from the boat. This was when Gernot, Giselher, and all the lords of first degree were on board. One and all, they remonstrated with Hagen, but he deigned them no reply. Nay, he even pushed the poor priest under the water with his oar, as he swam after the boat, resolved that he should die. But the decrees of fate must be fulfilled; the chaplain turned about and made for the shore; when his strength failed, then God's hand helped him, we are told. Finally he reached his goal, and as Hagen watched him shake his dripping garments he knew that the wild merwoman had spoken truth. From this time forth a grim reckless spirit took possession of him, while his courage and strength waxed almost to sublimity. When the last cargo was landed, he cut the boat to pieces with his mighty weapon, and cast the fragments into the stream.

“Why do you thus, brother?” spake Dankwart.
“How now shall we fare over upon our return?”

“Ay, there are faint hearts who would fain use the boat now!” responded the hero of Tronje; “but it is too late. He who would escape us now must perish in these waves.”

When the king’s chaplain saw the destruction of the boat from the opposite shore, he shouted over to Hagen:

“Faithless murderer! what has hardened your heart against me, your king’s unoffending chaplain?”

“Words need not be wasted upon that score,” rejoined Hagen, “but by my faith it troubles me sore that you have escaped my hands!”

“God be praised that I have done so,” cried the poor priest. “I fear you little now, rest assured of that. Go your way to the land of the Huns. Heaven forbid that you ever return to the Rhine!”

“I will make amends for all the wrongs that Hagen, in his frenzy, has done you,” cried King Gunther across the water to his chaplain, “if ever I return to the Rhine lands alive. Make your way home, since so it needs must be, and carry my truest greetings to my noble consort and all other friends who are left behind.”

The horses stood pawing the ground, impatient to press forward. Every man sprang into his saddle, except the king’s chaplain, he alone was compelled to pursue his journey on foot.

TWENTY-SIXTH ADVENTURE.

HOW DANKWART SLEW GELFRAT.

WHEN all were ready to press onward, King Gunther inquired who was able to guide them through the land, and the dauntless Volker, of Alzey, volunteered his services. Hagen now felt that the time had come for him to speak.

“Hearken,” cried he, “unto what I have to tell you. We shall never more return to the Burgundian land. Two merwomen told me so this morning; the king’s chaplain alone would return, they said. To prove the falsity of this it was that I strove to give him death. Now heed my friendly warning: prepare to defend yourselves to the utmost, for you are going to face a powerful enemy.”

These tidings spread rapidly, and the stoutest hearts quailed with dread. Hagen added, moreover, the true story of how the boat came into his possession, and told his companions that on the murdered ferryman’s account they were very liable to fall into difficulty with Gelfrat and Else, the margrave of Bavaria, and his brother. For this reason he advised them to keep close together, and not to ride rapidly, lest they be suspected of flying from danger. This counsel was strictly followed, and all day long the warriors rode through the Bavarian land with Volker, the bold fiddler as their leader, and with Hagen and

Dankwart for their surer protection, commanding the rear guards.

Gelfrat, meanwhile, had heard of the death of his ferryman, and, together with his brother Else, had raised an army of seven hundred armed men and set forth in pursuit of the enemy. The shades of evening were already beginning to fall when they overtook King Gunther's band. The tramp of their horses' hoofs resounded along the highway, causing Dankwart and Hagen to deem it expedient to wheel around and face them as they drew near.

"Who pursueth us on the highway?" exclaimed Hagen.

"We, the lords of the land, are in quest of our enemy," was Gelfrat's reply. "I know not who has slain my ferryman. He was a swift knight, and hath done me grievous wrong."

"Was the ferryman yours?" cried Hagen. "His death lies at my door. He refused to row us across the river and I slew him. Forsooth, I was sore pressed by him. Through that grim boatman I well nigh lost my life. I offered him gold to row us over, champion, to your land, which so incensed him that he dealt me a mighty blow with his strong arm. This roused my ire, and with my trusty sword I ended his life. I am ready to answer for the deed."

"You shall answer for it with your life," said Gelfrat, rushing frantically at Hagen.

A terrible struggle between the two ensued, while Else and Dankwart engaged in a fierce combat. Hagen was precipitated from his horse by a vigorous blow from Gelfrat's lance, but he speedily recovered himself. With renewed fury he sprang upon his op-

ponent, who had meanwhile dismounted, and the contest was further continued on foot. Each combatant held his ground nobly, but finally Gelfrat's blows knocked a huge piece from Hagen's shield, making the sparks fly and nearly depriving King Gunther's vassal of life. The dauntless knight was now compelled to call upon his brother for aid, whereupon Dankwart wheeled about and dealt Gelfrat so powerful a blow that soon this Bavarian margrave lay dying on the ground. Else strove to avenge his brother's overthrow, yet he and his people came to grief in the attempt. More than eighty of the Bavarian knights fell into the clutches of grim death through the might of the Nibelungen knights who had hastened to the rescue of their liege lords. His brother slain, wounded himself, nothing remained to Else but to flee with those of their men who yet remained alive. Hagen and Dankwart, with their followers, pursued the fugitives, sending after them many a deadly missile. At last Dankwart exclaimed:

“Let us now retrace our course. Our enemies are dripping with blood, let them go. We had better hasten after our friends. My words are spoken in good faith.”

When the spot where the contest had taken place was regained Hagen counted the number of the slain, and found that while there were at least an hundred upon the enemy's side there were but four on theirs. The shields of King Gunther's vassals were wet with gore. The clear moonlight breaking through the clouds displayed this to view.

“Make it not known unto my dear lords to-night, ye warriors, what has here transpired,” cried

Hagen. "Leave them free from care until morning dawns."

When those who had engaged in the combat overtook their friends, many a knight appealed to Hagen and Dankwart to know how soon they would reach a suitable resting-place.

"We cannot rest until the day dawns," was marshal Dankwart's reply. "Wherever we may then chance to be we will lie down in the grass."

Favored by the darkness of night, the traces of bloody combat were not detected. When the bright beams of the sun broke over the mountains, the king became first aware that there had been strife. Very angrily he exclaimed :

"How now, friend Hagen! what has happened, and wherefore have you scorned my aid?"

Then Hagen made known to him the events already recorded, and after this the weary hosts lay them down for a brief period of rest. What precise locality was chosen for this purpose has never been made known to us. They arose refreshed, sprang once more into their saddles, and never paused until they reached Passau. News of the approach of noble dame Ute's sons had preceded them, filling bishop Pilgerin's heart with gladness, for he knew not of the dangers which assailed them. Here the warriors tarried a day and a night, were tenderly cared for and refreshed, and then rode forward to the boundary of Rüdiger's domains.

At this point the weary wayfarers found a man lying by the roadside asleep, who proved to be none other than marshal Eckewart, Kriemhild's trusty vassal. The knight of Tronje aroused the sleeper by

snatching his sword from the spot where it was thrust into the ground to mark the boundary line.

“Ah, woe is me that I must endure such shame!” moaned Eckewart. “Ah, woe is me, Sir Rüdiger, that I have proved so unworthy a guardian of your boundary line! From the day I lost Siegfried my sorrows began.”

Taking pity on the noble knight’s distress, Hagen returned his sword, and gave him besides six gold-red clasps. Eckewart thanked him, and begged of him to turn back ere it was too late.

“It has not been forgotten,” said he, “that you slew Siegfried, and much hatred has been stored up against you therefore.”

“May God have us in his keeping!” rejoined Hagen. “But now the sole anxiety of these champions is to find good quarters for the night. Can you direct us to some host who is able to provide for us? Our horses, as well as ourselves, are weary with the long journey, and we are out of provender.”

“I can show you precisely the host you need,” responded Eckewart. “He dwells not far from here and Rüdiger is his name. No one is better able than he to provide for you. He is a noble warrior, virtue illuminates his heart as doth the May morn the flowery mead, and when he can serve heroes he is joyous and well pleased.”

And so it came to pass that King Gunther asked Eckewart if he would be kind enough to announce them to his good friend Rüdiger. Eckewart hastened to comply, that accommodations might be prepared for the guests. When the good people of Bechlaren

saw the speedy approach of the brave champion, they took it for granted that he had been attacked by enemies. Rüdiger himself went out to meet him, and asked if any harm had befallen him.

“By no means,” responded Eckewart. “I have been sent hither by three kings, Gunther, Gernot and Giselher by name. They proffer you their services, as do also Hagen, Volker and Dankwart. These swift champions, with one thousand knights and nine thousand esquires, are in need of your hospitality.”

With beaming countenance, Rüdiger made known his delight at this announcement. He gave prompt orders that everything should be put in readiness for the reception of the guests, having sumptuous apartments prepared in his own palace for the higher lords, and tents erected for the accommodation of the inferior vassals. He then commanded his best men to spring into their saddles and ride out to meet the honored guests.

TWENTY-SEVENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE LORDS WERE RECEIVED AT BECHLAREN.

THE margrave now sought out his wife and daughter, to announce to them the glad tidings that their sovereign lady's brothers were about to become their guests. He besought them to receive these warriors of high estate with the utmost courtesy, and authorized them to bestow the kiss of greeting upon the three royal brothers, as well as upon Hagen, Dankwart and Volker. The ladies assured him that he should have every reason to be content with them, then hied them to their robes to don their choicest attires.

Rüdiger's retainers, meanwhile, had found the guests, and shown them the way to the palace. The margrave received them most warmly, and invited the three kings, Hagen, Dankwart and Volker, with the knights of their train, to enter his palace. Dankwart inquired if provision had been made for the Nibelungen esquires; whereupon Rüdiger assured him that horses, as well as men, would find ample accommodations. Such hospitality had seldom been known.

The margravine, with her beautiful daughter, surrounded by their brilliant retinue, awaited the coming of the guests. Both mother and daughter kissed the lords, as they had been instructed; but when young Dietelind came to Hagen, she involun-

tarily shrank from him, because of his dark, stern looks. One glance from her father, however, recalled her to her duty, but she grew pale and rosy by turns, so unconquerable was her dread as she bestowed on the grim knight the kiss of greeting.

This ceremony concluded, the margravine took King Gunther by the hand, Dietelind took Giselher and led the way into the great palace hall, while Rüdiger followed with Gernot. The noble retainers, knights and ladies, came after them, and all took their seats while the choicest wines were served. Many an eye rested tenderly upon Rüdiger's daughter, and she was indeed lovely to behold.

Meanwhile tables were spread in the adjoining banqueting hall, and the guests were invited to partake of a bountiful feast. Gotelind, accompanied by her ladies, honored them with her presence at table. Her daughter she left to tarry with the maidens, according to the custom of the land, causing regret to many a knight. The ladies formed the subject of much discourse during the meal. Dauntless Volker was especially ready in introducing their names.

“Most noble margrave,” spake this fiddler good, “God has dealt graciously with you in bestowing upon you so beauteous a wife and daughter. Were I a king, most gladly would I share my throne with your daughter; she appears so lovely, so noble and good.”

“How were it possible that a king should woo my daughter dear?” exclaimed the margrave; “we are strangers here, my wife and I, and have no lands wherewith to dower her,—of what avail, then, is her beauty?”

"Did I think of marrying," said Gernot, "I should ask no other dower for my bride than such peerless beauty."

"My young lord Giselher has thought of seeking a bride," here courteously interposed Hagen, "and this young margravine is of such lofty lineage, that we vassals of the court would be proud to serve her, should she share our master's state."

This suggestion was highly pleasing to all parties, and Rüdiger declared that although he had no lands to bestow upon his daughter, he could give her as much silver and gold as two hundred horses could carry. The maiden was summoned forthwith, and asked if she would have young Giselher for her husband. As many a maiden had been before, she was covered with confusion at the proposal, but as soon as she could command her voice she modestly denoted her acceptance, for this noble youth had found favor in her eyes. The young couple stood surrounded by a circle of brave knights, and clasping the maiden in his arms, Giselher there sealed his betrothal. Then Rüdiger solemnly declared that when the Burgundians stopped at his palace on their return from King Etzel's court, Dietelind should be in readiness to follow her husband to his own home. After this the maiden was conducted in state from the hall, and the guests retired to rest.

The following morning, King Gunther and his champions spoke of resuming their journey, but Rüdiger insisted upon their remaining yet awhile with him, assuring them that it had been long since he had seen such beloved guests. Dankwart expressed

his fears that they would inconvenience their ~~host~~ by a longer sojourn.

“Should you remain a fortnight, my dear friends,” cried Rüdiger, “I would still have ample stores of provisions for you all.”

Thus it came to be decided that the champions should tarry three days with Rüdiger. On the fourth morning the trusty esquires led the richly caparisoned horses to the palace door, and the guests prepared to depart. The generous host bestowed his parting gifts without stint upon his honored guests. To King Gunther he gave a good suit of armor, such an one as that brave champion might well deign to receive, seldom as it was his wont to accept guerdon; to Giselher he had already given his fair daughter; to Gernot he gave a valuable sword, which that hero bravely wielded in the approaching storms. The margrave’s wife smilingly sanctioned this gift, that ere long served to bring the good Rüdiger to an untimely end.

Then dame Gotelind turned sweetly to Sir Hagen and besought him to accept of her some memento of his visit. She bade him choose for himself whatever best pleased him in the hall. Hagen was nothing loth to comply.

“Of all that I have seen,” began he, “nothing pleases me better than yon shield upon the wall. I would gladly bear it with me to the land of the Huns.”

With her own white hands Gotelind took down the shield from its place and handed it to the hero of Tronje. The tears came into her eyes as she told him that this shield had belonged to her noble

fether, Nudung, who had been slain in battle by Wittich. Hagen bowed low in acknowledgment of the honor thus accorded him by the gentle margravine. The shield was a rich and costly one; it was thickly studded with regal gems, and it had been valued by competent judges at a thousand marks. To Hagen's brother, Dankwart, rich apparel was presented by Dietelind, and he wore it proudly in the land of the Huns.

The swift champion, Volker, now came with his viol, and drew from it such melodious tones while he sang his touching farewell ditty, that dame Gote-lind was charmed. Forthwith the lady sent for her jewel-casket, and taking from it twelve costly bracelets, she pressed them into Volker's hands, and insisted that he should wear them for her sake at King Etzel's court.

Rüdiger had equipped himself and five hundred knights to ride with his guests, for their greater security, to King Etzel's land. Courteous and tender farewells were now spoken, and with fond kisses the worthy host parted from his loved wife, Giselher from his betrothed. From the palace windows the ladies watched the warriors ride away, and they consoled themselves for this parting with thoughts of the happy reunion. Alas! they were destined to meet never more again in life.

The warriors pricked gaily along the Danube banks, and when they reached King Etzel's boundary line, Rüdiger sent forward messengers to announce their coming. King Etzel was delighted with the news, and hastened to impart it to his queen.

“You must receive them well, Kriemhild, my wife,” quoth he; “your dear brothers are coming hither with great honors.”

Kriemhild stood by a window watching for the coming guests, while strange emotions surged madly through her heated brain. The old sorrow seemed suddenly uplifted from her heart, and an unnatural, fiendish joy took possession of this sorely-tried, sorrow-crazed woman, as she brooded over her plans of revenge.

TWENTY-EIGHTH ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD RECEIVED HAGEN.

WHEN the Nibelungen lords entered the land, old Hildebrand, Dietrich of Bern's master-of-arms, heard of it, and hastened to apprise his lord. Dietrich was sorely oppressed at thought of the evil that was now probably nigh at hand, and bidding his vassal, brave Wolfhart, old Hildebrand's nephew, make ready an escort of the Amelungen knights, he sallied forth with them to greet and warn the approaching guests. Hagen saw him and his knightly train from afar, recognized them immediately, and bid his friends follow his example in springing from his horse and hastening forward to meet them. The Amelungens also dismounted, and all met in the most friendly manner. So soon as the usual salutations were over, Dietrich plunged forthwith into his warning, and was surprised to find that Rüdiger had not suspected that of which he himself felt so well assured.

“Kriemhild still bewails the loss of her Nibelungen lord,” said he.

“Long may she weep!” ejaculated Hagen. “Many years have rolled away since he was slain. Kriemhild would do better to bestow her love upon King Etzel. Siegfried will not return from the grave.”

“So long as Kriemhild lives, harm may arise from his death,” rejoined the noble Dietrich. “O

thou consolation of the Nibelungens," he continued, turning to Gunther, "beware of coming ill."

"What have I to fear?" cried Gunther. "We are invited hither by King Etzel himself, and my sister Kriemhild has long been reconciled to us. The messengers brought us the most loving greetings from her."

"Hold!" cried Hagen,—"let Dietrich speak, that we may know what we have to fear from dame Kriemhild."

Then the lords stepped aside with Dietrich, who thus continued:

"What further shall I tell you? Every morning I hear Queen Kriemhild sob out her woe to the great God in heaven, beseeching him to aid her in avenging the brave Siegfried's death."

"Be that as it may," interposed the dauntless hero Volker, "it is now too late for us to withdraw. Nothing remains but for us to press forward to King Etzel's court, and bravely meet whatever may there befall us."

As the heroes rode through the land, the Huns crowded around to gaze upon them. Especially were they eager to behold Hagen, for they had heard much of him, and how he had slain dame Kriemhild's first husband, Siegfried, strongest of heroes. And truly these curious eyes rested upon a great man when they beheld Hagen. Ay; despite that one foul deed that has stained his history, the knight of Tronje had arisen to a tragic grandeur. We have seen how helpful, prompt and strong he was in serving his liege lords, what evidences he gave of his daring and loyal constancy; and now

we are to follow his heroic demeanor through his and their direst need. Hagen was tall, broad-shouldered and commanding in appearance; his limbs were strong, his carriage magnificent, his look threatening; and grizzled was now his hair and beard.

According to the queen's orders, the Burgundian esquires were conducted to quarters at some distance from those prepared for the knights, that it might be difficult for their lords to communicate with them. King Gunther commended his people to Dankwart, the marshal, bidding him see that they were suitably provided for. Kriemhild sallied forth to meet her guests, took her brother Giselher by the hand and kissed him; upon the others she did not deign to bestow more than a cold recognition.

"After such a reception," quoth Hagen, "the swift knights will indeed do well to pause and take counsel within themselves. Verily, the summons to this high-tide did betoken ill."

"Be welcome, I pray you, to all who are glad to see you here!" exclaimed Kriemhild. "No greeting is due you from me, for your friendship's sake. Say, what have you brought me from Worms, that I should bid you welcome?"

"You would have had us bring gifts with us?" questioned Hagen, contemptuously. "Even I am rich enough to have contributed my share, had I thought of that."

"One thing you might with justice have brought me," retorted Kriemhild. "Once more let me ask, what have you done with the Nibelungen hoard? That was mine, as well you know, and you should have brought it with you into King Etzel's land."

“By my troth, dame Kriemhild,” cried Hagen, “it has been many a long day since last I saw the Nibelungen hoard. That was buried in the Rhine long years ago, and there it must remain until the judgment day.”

“I thought so,” resumed the queen. “For the treasure that once was mine, and for its lord, I am doomed to weep forevermore. Golden stores I do not need, for great is now my wealth; but I, poor creature, do demand reparation for a murder and a double theft.”

Turning then to the other champions, the queen bade them confide their armor to her for preservation, as it was not allowable to bear it with them into the hall.

“By my troth,” cried Hagen, “that shall never be. I desire not such high honor, gracious queen, as to have you take charge of my shield, my sword and other armor. My father taught me to guard them myself.”

“Woe, woe is me!” wailed Kriemhild then. “Why will not my brother and Hagen give up their shields? Surely they have been warned. Did I but know who has done this thing, death should be his portion.”

“It was I who warned the noble lords and dauntless Hagen, their vassal,” cried Dietrich, wrathfully. “Now do your worst, thou devil’s bride!”

The queen was covered with shame at this reproof, for she stood mortally in awe of Dietrich, and flashing one hasty glance at her enemies, she strode silently away. Dietrich and Hagen stood hand in hand, after she had left them, and discoursed ear-

nestly of the Nibelungen need. King Etzel saw them, and inquired the name of the knight to whom Sir Dietrich had accorded so friendly a reception. One of his attendants told him that this was Hagen of Tronje, son of Aldrian.

“Well knew I Aldrian!” cried the king; “he was my vassal. I made him knight, and he won great honors at my court. Helke, the faithful, thought much of him. I brought Hagen as hostage into my land at the same time with Walther of Spain. They grew up together here. Hagen I sent home again, Walther fled with fair Hildegund.”

Thus did the king muse aloud over events that were past. He rejoiced that Hagen was once more at his court, remembering the services of his youth. Now in his riper age this knight cast into cold death’s embrace many of the mighty king’s friends.

TWENTY-NINTH ADVENTURE.

HOW HAGEN AND VOLKER SAT BEFORE KRIEMHILD'S HALL.

WHEN Hagen and Dietrich at last parted, the former glancing over his shoulder saw Volker, the fiddler good, talking with Giselher, and bade him join him. These two chosen warriors, each secure in the other's valor and fidelity, crossed the court together until they reached that part of the castle where were situated Queen Kriemhild's apartments. Here they seated themselves upon a bench before the door. In their glittering armor they presented a princely appearance, and the Huns who saw them stood gaping upon them like so many wild creatures. Kriemhild beheld them from her window, and grew exceedingly sorrowful at sight of them. All her woes arose fresh in her mind, and she began to weep bitterly. Her attendants were surprised at this, and eagerly inquired who had given her cause of grief.

“This, Hagen hath done, ye brave warriors!” she cried, and proceeded to recount her grievances.

“Speak only the word of command, gracious lady,” was the reply, “and all your wrongs shall be avenged.”

“To him will I be forever thankful who will wreak vengeance for me upon Hagen!” ejaculated the queen. “I will cast myself at his feet, and grant him whatsoever he may demand in recompense.”

Sixty warriors armed forthwith and prepared to sally forth to do their royal lady's bidding. All were united in the determination to slay both Hagen and Volker; but Kriemhild detained them.

"Hearken unto me," quoth she, in angry mood, "and essay not to contend with Hagen in such scanty numbers. Little do ye know the knight of Tronje's power, and one who sits beside him is stronger far than he."

When the knights heard these words, they increased their numbers to four hundred, and then the queen bade them wait until she had made ready to accompany them.

"You shall hear from Hagen's own lips," said she, "how grievously he hath wronged me. So haughty and so arrogant is he that he will disdain to deny my charges."

The bold minstrel espied the queen as she descended the steps leading from the castle. Immediately thereupon he descried the warriors in her train.

"Look yonder, friend Hagen," quoth he, "there comes the faithless one who has so treacherously bidden us hither. Never have I beheld a queen followed by so many armed men. Beneath their silken suits I see glistening coats-of-mail, and every knight is heavily armed. What meaneth this?"

"Well know I that hatred of me bringeth them hither," cried Hagen, wrathfully; "yet, why should I tremble before such foes as these? Tell me, friend Volker, will you stand by me in my struggle with Kriemhild's men?"

"That I will," most heartily responded Volker.

“Should King Etzel himself appear at the head of his entire army, so long as life remains I would not swerve one moment from your side.”

“Now, God in heaven reward you, noble Volker!” exclaimed Hagen. “Knowing that you are with me, what care I how many are against me!”

As Kriemhild drew near, Volker proposed that they should arise from their seats, out of respect to her crown; but Hagen demurred. He besought Volker, for love of him, to desist from a hypocritical show of respect which was far from both their hearts, and so they kept their seats. Hagen laid his sword Balmung, which had once been Siegfried’s, across his knees where it might attract Kriemhild’s attention, and Volker did the same with his viol-bow. When Kriemhild beheld the sword, it increased her fury, and this was what Hagen had desired. This sword had a golden hilt, in which shone a precious jasper, green as grass; and Volker’s viol-bow, be it also mentioned, was strong and mighty, fashioned, in many respects, like unto a sword. The dauntless fiddler drew nearer his friend as the queen thus began :

“Now tell me, Sir Hagen, who sent for you, that you made so bold as to venture into this land.”

“No one sent for me,” was the rejoinder. “Three knights were invited here, my liege lords; I am their vassal, and always follow them on their journeys.”

“Answer me yet another question,” continued the queen. “What have you done to merit the hatred I bear you?”

“Wherfore further parley?” exclaimed Hagen,

impatiently. "This is I, Hagen, who slew Siegfried, that dexterous warrior. How bitterly he atoned for dame Kriemhild's insults to peerless Brunhild, my liege lady! I make no effort to deny it, powerful queen. Let who will seek revenge, man or woman; I have wrought you much woe, and I would scorn to lie about it."

"Do you hear, ye knights," hissed Kriemhild, "how his own words condemn him? Now see that ye keep faith with me."

The warriors paused, and looked questioningly at one another. Many a battle storm had they passed through without experiencing a tithe of the dread that now filled their hearts.

"My rash promise I will never keep," cried one. "For no one's gold shall my life be jeopardized."

"That is precisely my mind," spake another. "What will all the gold in the world profit us when we lie weltering in our gore. This fiddler is invincible, I am well aware, and Hagen has been known to me from his youth up. I have seen him myself in two-and-twenty battles, and his hand hath sent mourning into many a woman's heart. When yet a boy, he won much honor at this court for his bravery; now that his hair is streaked with gray, his prowess has ripened to maturity, and grimly fierce is his mood. Besides, he carries the great sword Balmung, which he came to by no fair means."

Thus it was decided that the proposed attack should be abandoned. Heart-sore and angry the queen turned and followed the Huns back again into the palace. So soon as they had all vanished from sight, bold Volker exclaimed:

“We see now for ourselves that we have enemies here, as we were warned. Let us seek out our liege lords, and guard them from evil while we can.”

So they returned to the place whence they had come, and found the others still lingering about the court.

“How long will you stand here,” cried Volker aloud, “to be jostled about and gaped at? You would do better to seek audience with King Etzel, and learn how he is disposed.”

The brave champions, at these words, made ready to enter the palace. Dietrich took King Gunther by the hand, Irnfried took Gernot, Sir Rüdiger joined young Giselher, and thus paired, they made their way into the presence of the king, followed by Hagen and Volker. These last were henceforth inseparably united, and together they defied death. When the host of the Rhine was ushered into the hall, King Etzel sprang from his seat, and hastened forward to meet his honored guests.

“Welcome, Sir Gunther,” cried he, “and you, Sir Gernot, and this your brother, Giselher. Most welcome too, are these brave champions, Volker, the bold, and Sir Hagen. It has been my queen’s most earnest desire to see you all here; right joyful must be now her mood.”

“We have had proof of that,” interposed Hagen. “Believe me, mighty king, had I not ridden hither with my lords, I should have come alone, so much have I wished to see you.”

Then the noble king took each beloved guest by the hand, and led him to a seat. He ordered mead and wine to be served in golden vessels, and over-

whelmed his guests with pleasant, friendly words. Never were knights better received, and in due time a splendid banquet was made ready for them, of which the king himself partook with them. That was a magnificent palace where King Etzel dwelt; he had built it himself, and had had neither expense nor labor spared upon it. There was a series of castles and towers, suites of apartments without number, a broad fortress, and a sumptuous hall. This latter was of an enormous size, being expressly intended to accommodate a large number of knights. Surrounded by his twelve kings, and other mighty vassals, King Etzel here enjoyed many a social hour, and here he lingered with the Burgundian heroes until the evening was far advanced.

THIRTIETH ADVENTURE.

HOW HAGEN AND VOLKER KEPT GUARD.

THE day was over, night drew on apace, bringing with it many apprehensions to the weary Burgundians. King Gunther finally requested their host to have them conducted to their sleeping apartments for the night. King Etzel promptly acceded to this request, and parted from his guests with loving words, and promises for the morrow. On their way through the palace halls, the knights encountered many armed Huns, all of whom crowded about them, whereupon Volker threatened to strike with his sword-fiddlebow the first one who impeded their progress, so that his friends would indeed have cause to lament over him. And looking over his shoulder, Hagen cried:

“Make your way back to your own quarters, ye creatures of Kriemhild, that for which you thirst cannot be attained to-night. Leave us weary travelers to rest in peace, and come again in the morning. Never were heroes readier to give satisfaction than you will find us then.”

The guests were ushered into a broad hall, provided with luxurious beds, with coverlets of ermine and of sable, and quilts of superb texture. The knights viewed all these splendors with sorrowful mien, and young Giselher exclaimed:

“Woe, woe is me! Will ever my friends and I escape from these night quarters? My sister, who

lovingly invited us hither, has laid deep snares for our destruction, I fear, so deadly is her hatred."

"Banish your fears," spake Hagen, "I will myself be your sentry to-night, and guard you from harm until the morrow dawns."

The weary heroes heartily spoke their thanks, and casting themselves upon their luxurious couches, they prepared for peaceful slumber,—all but one, this was bold Volker. He watched Hagen, as this knight donned his stoutest armor, and finally from the fullness of his heart he cried :

"You will not scorn my companionship, Hagen, if I offer to keep guard with you?"

"By no means," rejoined Hagen, "Heaven reward you for your faithful friendship, dearest Volker! If death spares me, I will repay you for it one day."

Armed to the teeth, these two sallied forth to the outer door of the hall, there to keep their watch. Swift Volker leaned his shield against the house wall, and taking his viol in his hand, he served his friends as well became him. He seated himself upon a stone, bolder fiddler never lived, and produced such melodious tones that the homeless wanderers gave him heartiest thanks in their hearts. First he played a martial strain, and the house resounded with the music of his strings; his strength and his art were great. Sweeter and softer he then began to play, until many a careworn soul was lulled to sleep. It was their last lullaby. When Volker was assured that all slept, he once more took his shield in his hand, and now he paced to and fro before the door with Hagen.

About midnight a band of armed assassins drew

near. They had been sent thither by Kriemhild, with strict injunctions to single out Hagen and wreak vengeance upon him, without harming the others. Volker descried the glittering of their helmets in the distance. Drawing his comrade's attention thereto, he asked him what course of defense they had best pursue. Hagen advised quietly awaiting the approach of the wearers of the helmets, and then dealing such sword blows upon these that a second trial of skill would be impossible. Meanwhile the Huns had become aware that the door was guarded. When they recognized Volker as Hagen's companion, they halted, knowing that it would be impossible to execute their royal mistress's orders. When the brave sentinels noticed the hesitation of their enemies, Volker wanted to go forward and ask them wherefore they had come. Hagen detained him, reminding him that thus might arise a strife which would end in the door being left unguarded. They remained at their post, but Volker could not resist the impulse to exclaim, derisively:

“Ye armed vassals of Kriemhild, whither speed ye through the night? Are you in quest of plunder and strife? If so, take us along, that we may aid you.”

To this there came no reply, whereupon Volker continued, in still louder tones:

“Fie, ye dastardly wights! Ye have come out to murder sleepers, whom ye did not dare attack when they were awake.”

More he could not say, for by this time the assassins had vanished as silently as they had come. Kriemhild's heart sank within her when she learned of the failure of this her secret mission, and she set to work to mature new schemes of treachery.

THIRTY-FIRST ADVENTURE.

HOW THE LORDS WENT TO CHURCH.

ANON the air grew cooler, a breeze began to stir, and the comrades before the door knew that day was about to break. So they went in to awaken the sleepers, and by the time these were fully aroused, morning light broke through the hall. The minster bells began to chime for early mass, and the brave Nibelungen warriors made ready to heed the call. Seeing them don their gayest raiment, Hagen cried :

“ Ye must take other gear, warriors. Instead of rosaries, carry your swords in your hands; instead of jeweled hats, place your helmets upon your heads; instead of silken shirts, wear your hauberks; instead of gay mantles, your good shields. Well know you wily Kriemhild’s mood; to-day must we be ready for conflict. And beloved masters, moreover esquires and men, enter the minster with earnest hearts, and bewail to the all-powerful God your sorrow and your utmost need. Of a surety you will never hear mass again.”

Thus the royal brothers, with their entire retinue, proceeded around to the minster. Before the sacred precincts Hagen bade them pause and remain without on the defensive until they could gain some clue to the plan of action. Soon came King Etzel with his beauteous queen, followed by an immense retinue, all

in gala attire, and much did the wealthy sovereign marvel at the warlike appearance of his chosen guests. He inquired if any one had attempted to harm them, and assured them that if such were the case, the evildoer should grievously atone for the deed.

“No wrong has been offered us,” cried ever-ready Hagen, “but it is the wont of my lords at every high-tide to remain armed for three entire days.”

Kriemhild well knew that this was false, but she said not a word, although her eyes flashed bitter hatred at her arch-enemy. Powerful and frenzied as she was, however, she would have been unable to work further mischief had any one had but the courage to apprise the king of how matters stood.

To enter the church, the queen had to pass directly between Hagen and Volker, who had stationed themselves on either side of the door. Neither would yield one inch to allow the lady free entrance, and so, choking down her fury, she forced her way past them rather than attract her lord’s attention. After this, all entered the church, and mass was solemnized.

When service was over, King Etzel led the way back to the palace, in whose court a grand tournament was now held. Volker proposed that they should joust together, each after the manner most approved in his own land, and Etzel agreed, thinking it would be a choice pastime. Kriemhild and her ladies sat with the king, watching the feats of skill from the palace windows, and the queen’s dark broodings presented a strange contrast to the joyful mood of her lord. He exerted himself to the utmost to testify his delight at the presence of the guests who were bidden to his court, for far other ends

than indulging in pastime, and of all present the master of the land alone was in ignorance of this.

The Amelungens were very desirous of entering the lists; Sir Dietrich, however, forbade it. He considered it wisest that they should harbor their strength, knowing full well that they would need it. Neither did Rüdiger wish his retainers to participate, but he found, to his regret, that it would give offense if they wholly withdrew. The Danes were represented by a thousand men, with Hawart at their head, and with them came Irnfried and his Thuringians, and many others. The champion Blödel also took part in the tiltings, and with three thousand chosen warriors, made a grand display. Thoughts of deadly hatred ran riot in dame Kriemhild's brain as she viewed the scene before her, and she thirsted for the moment when all might be turned into stern reality. Spears flew to and fro, splinters were shattered from the finest shields, the greatest noise and confusion prevailed. The noble chargers were dripping with foam, and Volker, observing to Hagen that the Huns must lack courage to make the apprehended attack, or surely they would not have lost so good an opportunity, was about ordering them to be led to the stables, when there rode up a gay cavalier, most gorgeously attired. He was engaged in putting his horse through all manner of paces, and was looking up so sweetly at the ladies meanwhile that Volker grew provoked.

“Ah!” cried he, “yon coxcomb must receive his dues from my hand. What care I for the wrath of King Etzel or his wife?”

Gunther strove to dissuade him from so needless

a provocation, saying that he thought it would be foolish to thus give cause for blame, and that the first attack ought to come from the Huns. Volker desisted for a little while, but when they were once more in the heat of excitement, he charged upon the dashing Hun and pierced him with his spear. As the knight fell from his horse, great was the wailing and lamentation among the ladies, and the entire assemblage in the court was thrown into a state of dire tumult. Hagen hastened with sixty of his knights to the spot, and Gunther also took care that his minstrel was not left defenseless. Vowing vengeance, the Huns dashed forward to make the bold fiddler suffer for his deed, but King Etzel called to them from his window to desist. Then the monarch went down into the court himself, snatched the sword from the hand of a relative of the murdered man and angrily drove back his subjects. Volker, he said, had wrought the deed accidentally; his horse had stumbled—he had seen it himself—and whoever should harm the brave fiddler, or any other of the guests, should suffer for it. Proposing that further continuance of the game should be postponed until evening, the king then led the way himself into the palace hall. Here a splendid banquet was spread, and as the guests were taking their seats at the table, many armed vassals of the court came in. Etzel was much displeased with their warlike attire; and although he permitted his vassals to remain as they were, he declared that he who dare injure one of his guests should forfeit his life. It was long before every lordly guest was seated, and in the meanwhile Kriemhild took occasion to open her heart to Dietrich.

“Prince of Bern,” she murmured, “to you I turn in deep disquietude for aid and counsel. I know not what I now shall do.”

“Who touches the Nibelungens need look for no aid from me,” thereto interposed Dietrich’s man, Sir Hildebrand, a knight of virtue well approved.

“It would sorely grieve me,” said she, “did any one suffer harm but Hagen. He murdered Siegfried, my well-beloved, and whoever will single him out from the rest for punishment shall be amply rewarded by me.”

“How can that be done?” exclaimed master Hildebrand. “Surely you must see that if we strike Hagen there will arise so great a strife that rich and poor will alike taste death.”

“Spare us, great queen, further parley on this score,” hereupon began Sir Dietrich, in his courtliest fashion. “Your kinsmen never wronged me, nor is there just cause why I should engage with them in deadly combat. It does little honor to you, queen, that you should seek to betray your own friends who were bidden here by you. No, Siegfried’s death shall never be avenged by Dietrich’s hand.”

When Kriemhild found how free from treacherous intent was good Sir Dietrich, she betook herself to Blödel, her lord’s brother, and implored him to assist her in her foul plot. At first Sir Blödel refused to give ear to her entreaties and promises of recompense, but was finally moved to compliance by her assuring him that she would not only protect him from Etzel’s wrath, and endow him with lands and fortresses, but would also secure for him

Nudung's beauteous widow for his wife. Then he called his retainers about him and bade them accompany him to the stranger's quarters.

Kriemhild then joined her lord, and sat with him at table, amid all the mighty nobles who were assembled together, pagans and christians. As she could find no other pretext for occasioning strife, she ordered her young son, Ortlieb, to be brought into the hall, hoping that through his presence some dispute might arise. To what more hideous deed could revenge lead a woman? So soon as King Etzel espied his little son, he joyfully exclaimed to the royal brothers:

“See, my friends, this is your sister's boy and mine, our only son and heir. Should he grow up like his kinsmen, he will be strong and brave, and he shall rule over twelve rich kingdoms. Therefore you may look for useful service from young Ortlieb. Now, dearest friends, take with you your sister's son when you journey back to the Rhine. Treat the boy kindly, as his tender years require, and bring him up to all the virtues of manhood.”

“No doubt he will be very useful to my lords, if he grow to man's estate,” sneered Hagen; “yet the young prince looks not over strong. Methinks I shall seldom have occasion to attend Ortlieb's court.”

King Etzel made no reply; but he eyed the knight sternly, for this speech displeased him. Moreover, many there were who heard Hagen's dark words who would have been glad to resent them forthwith; but as the king, deeply though he were wounded, retained his composure, they were forced to do the same.

THIRTY-SECOND ADVENTURE.

HOW BLÖDEL FOUGHT WITH DANKWART.

MEANWHILE Blödel had led the way to the hall where the esquires were assembled with their marshal, Dankwart, feasting and making merry. As Sir Blödel fiercely strode up to the table, Dankwart gave him a friendly greeting, and inquired the purport of his visit.

“Greet me not,” cried Blödel, “my coming here meaneth death to you. For your brother Hagen’s foul murder of Siegfried you and many another must atone.”

“Nay, say not so, Sir Blödel,” replied Dankwart. “So soon must we rue this visit, paid in faith and honor? I was a mere youth when Siegfried was slain; how could I have offended King Etzel’s queen?”

“I neither know nor care,” exclaimed Blödel. “The deed was done by your friends, Hagen and Gunther. So ward ye well, ye poor strangers, for your lives are pledged to Kriemhild.”

“If this be your resolve,” spake Dankwart, “right sorry I am that I plead with you.”

With these words he drew his sword, and aimed so deft a stroke at Blödel, that the luckless knight’s head was severed from his body.

“Let that be Nudung’s widow’s dower,” spake the hero, for he had been told of Blödel’s compact with the queen.

When Blödel's men saw that their master lay dead upon the ground, they thronged about the fierce strangers, and a desperate conflict ensued. Dankwart cheered on his train to fiercest resistance, and those who had no broadswords tore benches asunder and wildly seized upon chairs and stools to use for weapons. The betrayed strangers defended themselves most bravely, and finally succeeded in driving out their armed foemen, five hundred or more of whom were left lifeless upon the floor. The sorry tidings were borne to every Hunnish knight, and before King Etzel knew it, over two thousand Huns had donned their armor and made their way to the Burgundian quarters. They drew up before the building, a mighty army, but the strangers, unprepared though they were, bravely defended themselves. Little, however, did their valor avail them; they were finally overpowered by the hosts that came thronging up. Such a wonder as was rarely heard of before must e'en be told,—within that hall there soon lay lifeless nine thousand esquires and twelve hardy knights of that Nibelungen throng. Dankwart alone stood living in the midst of his enemies. The din of battle was hushed, the wild uproar had ceased, and surveying the ghastly floor over his shoulder, this solitary knight exclaimed:

“Alas, brave comrades, that I must see you perish! Now stand I alone among my foemen.”

Sword strokes fell heavily about his single person, yet he met them all with his good buckler, and many a hero's lady did he give cause for weeping, through his retaliatory blows. Finally, this son of Aldrian grew faint and exhausted with the long continued exercise of strength.

“Ah, woe is me!” he cried; stand aside, ye Hunnish warriors; let the air cool me, storm-weary man.”

With these words he cut his way to the door. Without, he was attacked by a fresh relay of Huns, who, as yet, had heard nothing of the wonders his hands had wrought. These, too, he kept in abeyance; and so dismayed were they by the invincible hero’s matchless strength, that not a man among them durst meet him sword to sword. Their darts they showered at him, and his shield was soon so full of these that he could scarcely carry it.

“Now, would to God,” cried he, “that I had a messenger at hand to bear tidings to my brother Hagen of how sorely I am pressed.”

“Nay, you shall bear your own message when we bring you cold and dead to your brother,” retorted the fierce Huns. “Then shall Gunther’s vassal know for himself the sting of sorrow.”

“Give over your threats,” cried the warrior; “stand farther from me, or I will fill your haubergeons with blood. I myself will report the heavy tidings at yonder court, and lament our deadly wrongs to my lords.”

Here the weight of his heavy shield overmastered him, and he dropped it to the ground. Seeing him thus defenseless, his foemen rushed at him from both sides; but as the wild boar fights its way through the dogs in the chase, so did he serve his enemies. Many a powerful knight fell before him, and the ground beneath fierce Hagen’s brother was reeking with gore. Thus he fought his way to the palace. Cup-bearers and stewards, hearing the

fearful tumult, dropped the choice drinks and dainty viands they were bringing to the board.

“How now, ye stewards!” cried Dankwart; “your duty it is to bear these viands to the table, and bountifully supply the honored guests,—mine, to declare strange tidings to my lords.”

All who dared confront him, as he flew upstairs, met with such fearful slashes, that soon every one stood tremblingly aside from that mighty broad-sword of his. At last the hall was reached, and bursting open the door, he rushed in, sword in hand. It was shortly after young Ortlieb had been paraded before the guests.

THIRTY-THIRD ADVENTURE.

HOW THE BURGUNDIANS FOUGHT WITH THE HUNS.

“BROTHER Hagen, you sit there too long in repose,” shouted Dankwart. “To you and to God in heaven I bewail our dire misfortune. Knights and esquires lie slain in their quarters.”

“By whom has this deed been done?” cried Hagen, fiercely.

“By Sir Blödel’s men,” was the rejoinder. “Dear-ly has their lord himself paid for leading them on to slaughter. With this right hand I smote his head from off his shoulders at one stroke.”

“You did him honor,” cried Hagen; “small is the evil when hero dies by the hand of hero. But who has wounded you, dear brother? Whosoever he may be, if he be yet in this land, he shall forfeit his life.”

“I am unscathed,” rejoined Dankwart; “the blood you see is that of the Huns whom I have slain.”

“Guard well the door, brother Dankwart,” here-upon ejaculated Hagen. “Let not a single Hunnish knight cross the threshold. I myself will hold converse with those within as necessity compels.”

Kriemhild’s sworn allies were madly incensed when they found the door guarded by the bold champion, who had slain the king’s brother. At once they began an angry whispering with one another, conferring together on the best course of action.

Hagen noted this, and with mutterings of unconquerable fury he drew his sword Balmung, turned savagely upon young Ortlieb, and smote off that infant's head, which bounded into Kriemhild's lap. At once there spread a fearful butchery among the warriors. With uplifted hand Hagen dealt a fatal stroke at young Ortlieb's tutor, and this wise man's ghastly head rolled under the table. Next the wrathful champion flew at Etzel's chosen minstrel, who still sat holding his viol, and suddenly lopped off his right hand, bidding him take that for the message he had brought to Worms.

"Alas, my hand!" shrieked Werbel. "What have I done, Sir Hagen, that you should serve me so? I came in faith and honor into your master's land. Ah, woe is me! How shall I now make music?"

Little cared Hagen for this pitiful lament. He further pursued his course around the banqueting-hall without deigning a word of reply, and dealt his fearful death-strokes wherever he went. His comrade, Volker, had sprung quickly from the table at the first outbreak, his deadly fiddle-bow clattering in his hand; and now, like the trump of doom, sounded the harsh, discordant notes of Gunther's minstrel, fitting music to that death-dance. The three royal brothers had also sprung from the table, thinking to prevent a general conflict, but vain were their efforts when once Hagen and Volker began to rage so furiously. The lord of Rhineland himself joined in the fray, dealing dole around him on every side; and sturdy Gernot rushed into the thickest of the fight, wielding his sword, Sir Rüdiger's gift,

with deadly skill. Also, most marvelous deeds were wrought by Giselher, dame Ute's youngest son. All of the brave Nibelungen knights distinguished themselves, and Etzel's men stood stoutly on their defense. Wild shrieks of woe reverberated through the palace. Knights without strove to force the guarded portal, in order to aid their friends, but not one could succeed in passing Dankwart. Seeing this valiant hero's deadly peril, his brother Hagen shouted aloud to dauntless Volker:

“See you how my brother is beset by yonder crowd? Up and save him, comrade, or we shall lose the good knight!”

Straight the fearless minstrel strode through the hall, playing his harshest strains, and ever and anon his keen-edged sword fiddle-bow dealt destruction around him. When the minstrel knight reached fearless Dankwart, he shouted back to Hagen that now the door was more secure than if a thousand bolts protected it. The fight within waxed ever hotter and hotter. The host was bewildered with horror and anguish at this unlooked-for ending to his friendly banquet, and even proud Kriemhild was affrighted at her hideous work. Casting imploring glances at Dietrich, she cried:

“Help me, noble knight! If Hagen reach me, I have death close at hand.”

“How can I help you, fair queen?” rejoined Sir Dietrich. “So grievous is the wrath of Gunther and those in his train, that no life is safe. I am powerless to protect any one.”

“Nay, say not so, Sir Dietrich. Give proof of your heroic valor, and bring the king and me hence

in safety, else we shall surely die," wailed the stricken woman.

Moved by these entreaties, Dietrich sprang upon the table, and his voice resounded through the echoing hall like the blast of a trumpet. Gunther recognized Dietrich's voice as it pealed above the clash and tumult, and turning, beheld the warrior beckoning with his hand. At a signal from their liege lord, the Nibelungen warriors drew back their swords, and hearkened unto what Dietrich had to say. King Gunther asked the chosen champion if any one had harmed him, whereupon good Sir Dietrich responded that he wished to make no complaint; all that he desired was permission, in the name of their former friendship, to leave the hall with the king and queen. Fierce Wolfhart sneeringly derided this asking as a favor for what might be won by force, but Dietrich ordered him to hold his peace. Gunther consented at once to the departure of Sir Dietrich, with all his chosen friends, as well as the king and queen. So the champion of Bern passed safely from the hall, with the trembling queen leaning on one arm and King Etzel on the other. Six hundred Amelungen champions sped forth with them. The noble margrave Rüdiger then exclaimed :

"Tell me, King Gunther, if there be yet others in this hall whose presence you could spare, that friendship's bond may remain unbroken."

Young Giselher well comprehended the import of these words, and expressed his heartfelt desire that there should be peace and constant unity between them. So Rüdiger also, and his five hundred retainers, passed safely from the hall. A Hunnish knight

stroved to take advantage of these departures, but as he was about escaping from the hall, the furious minstrel, with one stroke of the sword fiddle-bow, severed his head from his body. When the host of the land had passed from out the door, he turned and cast a fierce glance upon Volker.

“Ah, woe is me!” the monarch cried. “Woe is me for these fell strangers! Oh, grievous strait, that all my faithful warriors lie dead before them! Yonder fiddler rages like a wild boar. Thank heaven that I am safe from such a fiend! Forsooth, ill sound his measures; his strokes are bloody red, and his strains bring death to many a man. Never had I such a guest!”

While thus the monarch was led wailing down the stairs, the guests strove for deadly vengeance against their treacherous foemen. Ah, how the valiant Volker rent asunder the helmets of those who ventured near, and wildly impassioned was the music he played to the hideous death-dance. Gunther noted this, and cried to Hagen:

“Hear you what a measure Volker plays beside the door?”

“Ay, yon is a trusty follower,” thereto responded Hagen; “never saw I minstrel stand so lordly as he has done this day. We were always faithful comrades, he and I, and if ever we see Rhine-land, no chance shall ever sever us two.”

Soon all the fierce Huns who had been at the festal board lay weltering in their gore. Hushed was then the tumult, and each bold Burgundian knight laid aside his reeking sword.

THIRTY-FOURTH ADVENTURE.

HOW THE DEAD WERE CAST FROM THE HALL.

AFTER all their labor, the lords sat down at last to rest from weariness. Volker and Hagen passed before the hall, and there the haughty champions stood leaning upon their bucklers, engaged in earnest converse. Young Giselher told his friends that in his opinion it was unwise to rest before the dead were borne from the hall. More fighting would unquestionably follow, he said, and these fallen bodies would impede their action. This counsel was swiftly acted upon, and Hagen especially was loud in his praise of the young master who displayed so much forethought. Seven thousand lifeless forms were cast from out the door, and rolling down the stairs lay in heaps below. Among these was many a warrior who had not yet ceased to breathe, and who under tender treatment might have recovered. Every one of these perished through the fall. Their friends deplored their fatal doom with wails of sorrow.

“I see now that they have told me truth who called the Huns base cowards,” spake Volker, the fiddler. “There they stand, wailing like women, instead of tending their wounded.”

A Hunnish margrave at this moment saw a luckless kinsman come tumbling down the stairs, and not comprehending the full derisive import of these words, he threw his arms about him, hoping to bear him away. At him the fiddler aimed a lance, which

laid him lifeless on the ground. When this was seen by the other Huns, they fled terrified. Volker then brandished high in the air a spear which had been hurled at him by one of their number, and cast it with gigantic force far beyond the crowd of fugitives, to the dismay of all. Many thousand men were now assembled before the house, with King Etzel at their head. Whereat both Volker and Hagen contemptuously accosted the monarch:

“Well were it for the people,” said Hagen, “did their liege lords stand foremost in the fight, as do my own redoubtable masters.”

This aroused every spark of knightly valor in Etzel, and he vigorously grasped his shield. Dame Kriemhild, however, entreated him to be wary, assuring him that he could never cope with Hagen. The king insisted upon pressing forward, but his warriors held him back by force. Hagen continued to heap torrents of abuse upon both Kriemhild and her lord, causing the former to weep with rage.

“Whoever will slay Hagen of Tronje,” cried she, “and bring unto me his head, shall be rewarded by me with as much gold as can be piled upon King Etzel’s shield, as well as with lands and castles.”

“Why hesitate, ye men!” cried Volker. “Never have I seen champions so faint-hearted. Surely Etzel can never trust them more if they fail him now in his direst need.”

Good knights of many countries stood around, and yet it was long ere one was willing to venture upon so hazardous an exploit. Sorely grieved at this was the bold margrave Iring, Hawart’s vassal. This he proved by his own valor.

THIRTY-FIFTH ADVENTURE.

HOW IRING WAS SLAIN.

“**M**Y whole life through have I striven to win glory,” cried the fearless Danish knight, “and I have ever borne me bravely in the storm of battle. So bring me now my harness. I will fight with Hagen—I alone.”

“Nay, I would warn you against so rash a deed,” cried Hagen, scornfully. “You will only prepare fresh grief for your friends if you come. Let two or three of you attempt to enter this hall, and I will send them headlong down the stairs.”

Stern Iring was not one to be thus daunted, and he began unhesitatingly to equip himself after knightly fashion. At the same time, bold Irnfried, of Thuringia, and stalwart Hawart, the Dane, made ready with a thousand men to support Iring in his design. This, daring Volker saw, and it enraged him. Turning to his comrade Hagen, he cried:

“See you yonder armed knights, friend Hagen? This is how Iring ventures forth alone to encounter you. Forsooth, it ill becomes a knight to lie.”

“Call me not a liar,” Iring said; “I have no thought of breaking my word. Terrible, indeed, though Hagen may be, I shall bide by my resolve to meet him alone.”

With these words he turned to his friends and kinsmen, and insisted upon their allowing him to

meet the stern Burgundian as he designed. Fain would they have denied his request, but they found him so athirst for honor that they were obliged to let him have his way. A deadly strife ensued between the two grim opponents. The valiant Danish knight held his quivering spear aloft, and, protecting himself well with his shield, swiftly mounted the stairs and rushed toward Hagen; each cast his spear at the other with such overmastering power, that, piercing the strong bucklers, the shafts flew to a great distance. Then the rival champions drew their swords. Gigantic as was Hagen's strength, Iring so smote at him that wall and tower re-echoed as from thunder blast. Finding, however, that even thus there was small prospect of conquering his foe, Iring suddenly made an assault upon the warrior fiddler, thinking to speedily overcome him. Volker warded off all his blows, and in return dealt such that the splinters flew from his opponent's shield. Then Iring tried his skill on Gunther; their blows fell thick as hail upon each other, yet neither could succeed in inflicting a wound. Next he flew at Gernot, and was so enraged at this warrior's fierce defense, that he turned and slew four Burgundian knights.

“Now, by heaven, Sir Iring,” cried young Giseler, whose wrath was thereby kindled, “your life shall pay the forfeit for this bloody work!”

So saying, he rushed at the knight and felled him to the ground. For a moment every beholder believed the Dane to be dead; but he was only stunned, and soon sprang to his feet, ready for fresh action. He darted now to the spot where Hagen

stood, and struck at him with such force that he cleft that warrior's helmet, and inflicted a severe wound on his head. So soon as Hagen felt the gash and pain, he retaliated upon the Dane, who, no longer able to meet his fury, turned and fled down stairs. Arrived in the midst of his friends, Iring was overwhelmed with praise, and received Kriemhild's heartiest thanks for making Hagen bleed.

"Spare your thanks yet awhile," spake Hagen, derisively. "There is little yet to be said, but if your champion further try his skill among us, he is indeed a brave man!"

Iring was standing in the breeze, cooling him in his mail-coat, with his helmet uplifted. Fired by these words, he bade his friends arm him anew without delay, and bring him a fresh buckler, as his was battered in the fight. The foes met this time at the bottom of the stairs, and so terrific was now the wrath of Hagen, that the Danish knight's prowess proved of little avail. First, Iring was wounded with his opponent's sword, and ere the luckless Dane had time to rally, Hagen hurled at him a spear, which pierced him through the head. Back among his people Sir Iring recoiled, and ere they could remove his helmet, they broke the lance. Death was then nigh at hand. A sorrow-laden band crowded around the dying warrior, wailing their sad lament. Even Kriemhild bent over the prostrate form and wept aloud. Then the hero faintly said:

"Fair and noble lady, cease to grieve for me. What avails your weeping? I must needs part

from life, for these wounds are mortal. And as for you, my friends," he added, turning to the Thuringians and Danes, "seek not to earn the queen's gold. With my last breath I warn you that he who fights with Hagen must see death."

These were Iring's last words, and as he ceased to speak he fell back dead. Irnfried, Hawart, and a thousand men, pressed wildly forward to avenge their hero's death. Their wrath was fierce and hot, and as they sprang into the midst of their enemies, terrific strokes fell thick on every side from their weapons. Destruction alone, however, awaited them. Irnfried engaged in mortal combat with Volker, and ere many blows had been interchanged, the landgrave dropped dead before that fiddler bold. Hawart closed with Hagen; their strife was marvelous to behold, until finally the Dane was laid low by Sir Hagen's hand. Seeing their leaders slain, the Danes and Thuringians dashed shrieking into the hall. The Burgundians permitted them to enter, and then slew them every one. Deep silence reigned after this, and the bold Burgundian knights laid down their bloody swords and bucklers to pause awhile for rest. The unwearied Volker stood guard before the house, ready to announce the approach of any foeman. Below in the court King Etzel wailed loudly over his misfortunes, and dame Kriemhild uplifted her voice with his. Sorrowing dames and damsels rent the air with their cries. Death seemed leagued against them.

THIRTY-SIXTH ADVENTURE.

HOW KRIEMHILD GAVE ORDERS TO BURN THE HALL.

“UNLACE your helmets,” cried undaunted Hagen, “my comrade and I will keep watch over you.”

Many a good champion, at these words, bared his lofty brow. They seated themselves, unwittingly, in their great exhaustion, upon the bloody corpses of those who had died by their hands. This was noted by those who watched them through the windows, and it served to increase the bitterness against them. Ere evening closed, the king and queen had mustered together twenty thousand chosen Hunnish knights, all well prepared for combat. Once more there arose a fearful strife against the Burgundians, which lasted until darkness surrounded the fierce opponents. The guests defended themselves against Etzel’s powerful men, as well became good warriors. Dankwart in especial distinguished himself, much to the astonishment of his foes, who thought he had perished long before. It was on a mid-summer day that this murderous fight took place. The whole dark tragedy arose through Kriemhild’s determination to avenge her past wrongs, and yet in all her very darkest broodings she had never dreamed of such sweeping slaughter. She wished to single out Hagen for vengeance, and had to learn, in anguish, that when once the promptings of evil

are obeyed, it is impossible to control the progress of the work instigated.

The day was ended, and the haughty warriors of Burgundy began to feel that they would prefer death to the slow, lingering torture that seemed to await them. They yearned for peace, and begged the Huns to bring King Etzel before the hall. Etzel and Kriemhild both obeyed the summons, and the guests, all blood-stained and fainting as they were, advanced to meet them.

“What want you of me?” asked the host of the land; “surely you cannot hope for peace and friendship after all the mischief you have done me. So long as I have life, you shall rue the murder of my kinsman and my son.”

“We were compelled by grievous need,” thereto responded Gunther; “my retainers fell in their quarters before your warriors. How did I deserve such treatment, who came hither in all faith as your friend?”

“Ye noble knights of Etzel,” here interposed young Giselher, “in what had I offended you? I undertook this journey in kindness and friendship.”

“Ay, this realm is teeming with your kindness!” came the mocking response. “Would that you and your bloody kinsmen all had remained in Worms!”

“Could we come to terms of peace, even at this late moment,” cried Sir Gunther, “it would be well for both parties. We home-distant warriors little merited our treacherous reception.”

“Your loss and mine,” was the host’s sorrowful rejoinder, “are not to be compared. The shame,

the loss, the woe that I have this day endured, can never be forgotten. For this, not one of you shall escape hence alive."

"If you are resolved to slay us, be speedy," cried Gernot to the king, "and at least grant us open space to defend ourselves."

King Etzel and his warriors would have acceded to this request, and have permitted the strangers to come down before the palace gates, but Kriemhild quickly prevented it. She angrily bade the Huns beware of what they were about, assuring them that if once her high-born kinsmen were refreshed by the cool breeze, they would surely overcome the most mighty hosts. "The world has no such warriors," she concluded.

"Ah, once beloved sister mine," spake young Giselher, "little did I think, when you bade me cross the Rhine, that you would plunge me into such woe! I was ever true to you, and never did you wrong. In the name of the love I have borne you, dear sister, look on us with kindness."

"Speak not to me of kindness," cried the frenzied queen, "to whom no kindness hath been shown. Hagen of Tronje wrought me most grievous wrong at home, and here he slew my child, and all his friends must with him pay the penalty. And yet," she added, becoming softened for a moment, "we are children of one mother, you, your brethren and I. Fain would I spare your lives if you would but yield up Hagen into my custody."

"God forbid!" cried Sir Gernot, proudly. "Were there a thousand of us, rather would we all lie dead than yield up one trusty friend."

Both Giselher and Dankwart united with Gernot in this refusal, and loudly braved their foes to do their worst. Then Kriemhild urged on her men, who by dint of spears and broadswords, drove into the hall all who stood without, yet further advantage they could not gain. Seeing this, Etzel's frenzied queen gave orders to set fire to the hall. A gentle breeze was beginning to stir, and soon the building was filled with flames. Never were mortals in such dire distress as those within. They were tormented with the heat and smoke, and many began to complain of an unbearable thirst. Sir Hagen, hearing this, bade the knights take a draught of blood, assuring them that in such a heat it was better than wine. Immediately one of the warriors knelt down beside a corpse, and seizing a helmet, drank of the flowing blood.

"Now God requite you, Hagen," cried he, "for telling me of such refreshing drink!"

When the others heard this, and saw with what delight he drank, many followed his example, and found their failing strength renewed. The fire-flakes fell thickly into the hall, but the warriors warded them off with their shields, and extinguished them in the blood under foot. In such extremes of anguish the night wore away, the sleepless fiddler and his comrade Hagen keeping watch before the door. Toward morning, both of these trusty knights betook themselves again into the hall, in order that the Huns might think they all had perished.

When morning dawned, there came a hostile train of warriors to the hall, taking it for granted that the guests were all dead, and great was their

surprise to find six hundred living knights. It was long before Kriemhild could be convinced that such a fiery tempest had spared a single head, and when she did realize it, she offered the Huns golden treasures beyond compare, if they would complete the destruction of her enemies. And now the weary warriors were greeted with a shower of deadly missiles, that robbed full many an one of life. Twelve hundred Hunnish knights after this strove to force the fatal entrance, but although they slew many of the strangers, they were soon laid low themselves, every one.

THIRTY-SEVENTH ADVENTURE.

HOW MARGRAVE RÜDIGER WAS SLAIN.

THE strangers had fought as well befitted their fame, of this there was dolorous evidence. So thought the faithful Rüdiger when he entered the courtyard, and he wept at the woe that surrounded him on every side. Longing for peace, he sent for good Sir Dietrich, that together they might change the king's intent; but Dietrich for answer sent him word that Etzel was now too much enraged to listen to any cessation of hostilities. A Hunnish knight saw Rüdiger standing there with tearful eyes, and he pointed him out to Kriemhild, saying aloud that he deemed it base ingratitude and cowardice in one upon whom the monarch of the land had conferred so many honors not to have struck one knightly blow in all the battle. In angry mood the faithful warrior turned and dealt the fault-finder a blow that laid him dead at his feet.

“Away with you, base scoundrel!” spake the good margrave. “I have sorrow and heaviness enough without being reviled by such as you for not fighting. How could I have uplifted my hand against those whom I myself guided into this realm?”

“What have you done, noble Rüdiger?” cried King Etzel, reproachfully. “We have dead enough around us without thus increasing their numbers.”

“Yon fellow provoked me beyond reason, I

own," rejoined Rüdiger. "He twitted me with the favors your hand has showered upon me and reproached me with cowardice."

Kriemhild, too, deeply lamented what had befallen the luckless Hun through the hero's anger. She asked Rüdiger wherein she had deserved that he should increase her anguish, and reminded him of the homage he had sworn her when he bore King Etzel's suite to the Rhine.

"You said you would serve me to your dying day," said she; "never can I so deeply need your aid as now."

"True indeed are your words, right noble lady," responded the margrave. "I pledged to you my life, but not my soul. I brought the princes hither, and dare not harm them now."

"Remember, Rüdiger," continued the queen, "the oath you made me that you would take vengeance on whomsoever should wrong me."

With this, both king and queen approached the warrior and piteously entreated him to aid them. The good margrave was overcome by his emotions, and thus in anguish cried:

"Woe is me, the God-forsaken, that I have lived to see this day! Shall I forget my honor? Shall I be faithless to the virtue and fidelity with which God has endowed me? Woe is me that death comes not to my rescue! Whichever part I take, I must needs forsake good and do evil. Should I side with neither, the whole world will blame me. May the author of my being guide me aright!"

King Etzel and his queen redoubled their entreaties, and the gentle margrave in reply implored

his liege lord to take back all his possessions and leave him free to act in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. He said that he would rather journey forth into distant realms with his wife and daughter, a homeless wanderer, than be dishonored by entering into such a hateful strife. Thereto the king told him that knightly succor was needed, not the return of gifts, and he promised the good Rüdiger to give him even half his royal kingdom if he would wreak vengeance on the dread foemen of the land.

“How can I harm them?” spake the blameless margrave. “Home to my castle I invited the high-born warriors; as guests I took them in, set before them viands and drink at my table, and gave them of my choicest gifts. How can I strike them dead? Let the people deem me dastard. When did I ever before refuse my service? No, no! It is to ancient bonds, methinks, and former favors we should cling. I have served the noble princes and their followers; should I now meet them in mortal combat, I must needs rue the friendship that united us. To young Giselher I gave my daughter, believing that the maiden could find no fitter mate. Never saw I young prince so brave and virtue-laden as he.”

But Kriemhild implored him without ceasing to have pity on her anguish, and after long struggles the knight of Bechlaren, commanding his wife and daughter to the mercy of both king and queen, yielded.

“I gave my word, and I will keep it well,” said he. “Alas for my friends whom I must slay!”

With this he began forthwith to muster his band

of heroes. Speedily the attendants caught up shields, helmets and glittering harness, and ere long Rüdiger and five hundred of his men were armed, together with twelve knights who hoped to win renown in the storm of battle. Young Giselher despaired his lady's father advancing at the head of an armed host in battle array. He wondered what the meaning of this could be, yet concluded that no action of the noble margrave's could mean ought but what was just and right.

"Happy am I to have such friends!" he began. "For my lady's sake, help is nigh at hand."

"You take comfort too easily," spake the fiddler good and true. "When saw you warriors advance for friendly intent with laced helmets on their heads and naked swords in their hands?"

Before Volker had ceased speaking, the noble Rüdiger was close by the door. His well-tried shield he laid at his feet, but he neither proffered service nor made friendly greeting. To those within, he shouted:

"Ye brave Nibelungens, stand upon your defense. Fain would I bide by our bond of friendship, yet I must needs become your foe."

The sorely oppressed warriors were filled with anguish at hearing these words. Not a man among them but sorrowed that a friend should turn against them when they had suffered so much from foes.

"God forbid!" cried Gunther. "It cannot be that you, in whom we trusted, can prove faithless in such an hour as this!"

"It is too late to withdraw," said Rüdiger. "I have given my word and must fight with you. Fain

would I aid you, yet dare not encounter the reproach and shame."

"Think not of that, good Rüdiger," said Gernot. "If only you get us hence alive, you shall be so amply rewarded for all your friendship that you need not think of shame."

"Would to God, Sir Gernot," answered Rüdiger, "that you were safe in Rhineland and that I were dead! Then were my honor rescued."

"Here is the sword you gave me to use against my enemies," cried Gernot. "It has never failed me in my need. Your death I should sorely rue, and yet, if you turn against my friends, with this same sword I must take your life."

"Would that I were not forced to be your foe!" were the words now wrung from the noble margrave's tortured heart.

"Why do you thus, Sir Rüdiger?" cried Giselher. "My friends here all love you, as do I. You do ill to widow your peerless daughter."

Then the blameless margrave most touchingly commended his daughter to young Giselher's protection in case it should be the will of God for the Burgundians to escape thence in safety, but Giselher replied sadly that if his kinsmen should perish by the father's hand, the bond with the daughter must be at an end.

"Then God have mercy upon us!" said the valiant margrave.

At once they raised their shields and made ready for combat. Thereat Sir Hagen cried aloud:

"Tarry yet awhile, right noble Rüdiger, I am beset with grievous need. The shield that dame

Gotelind gave me is hewn to pieces. Would that I might defend me in the coming fight with such a buckler as yours!"

"You shall have this of mine," was Rüdiger's reply, despite Kriemhild's ire. "There, take it! May you bear it well and live to bring it with you to the Rhine!"

Stern as was Hagen, he melted at this gift, and the eyes of many a champion filled with scalding tears. One and all mourned that they must fight with one who was capable of such generosity on the eve of battle, and Hagen began loudly to extol the good Rüdiger.

"Your like will never appear on earth again," cried he. "May God protect your virtue! Alas that we must do battle one against the other!"

"Ay, it grieves me to the heart," said Rüdiger.

Then Hagen made a solemn vow that in return for Rüdiger's gift his hand would never touch the noble margrave in the fight. Rüdiger bowed low in acknowledgment of this, and those around wept aloud. When Volker heard the compact which his comrade Hagen had made, he begged Rüdiger to accept the same from him.

"Behold these bracelets!" quoth the fiddler-good, "your fair lady, noble margrave, bade me wear them to honor her before the royal Hun. Would that you could be my messenger to her, and tell her that I have done so!"

"May it please God that the margravine shall hereafter give you more besides!" was the reply; "yet doubt not that I will bear your message to my well-beloved wife, if I live to see her again."

No longer could the gentle Rüdiger dally, and seizing another shield, he rushed fiercely forward at the Burgundians. Hagen and Volker kept out of his way, according to their promise, neither was young Giselher willing at first to fight with the father of his bride. King Gunther and his brother Gernot allowed Rüdiger to force his way into the hall, in order to take his life the more surely. The margrave's warriors followed manfully in his footsteps, brandishing their swords as they strove in close fight. Although faint and weary, the guests dealt many a swift blow at their new opponents. Hagen and Volker sprang furiously at Rüdiger's noble train, giving quarter to one single man alone. The clashing blades made a fearful clatter, blood flowed from under helmets, and precious stones rained down from shields into the gore. The lord of Bechlaren proved, in that day's bloody work, that weapon had never been handled by a more redoubtable knight. He slew such hosts of Burgundians that finally the passion of Sir Gernot was kindled to its uttermost.

"You will not leave me one of my men, right noble Rüdiger," cried he. "No longer can I bear to see my friends slaughtered. Your gift must be brought to bear against you this day. So turn and face me, noble, high-born man!"

The fame-aspiring champions sprang wildly at each other, and so sharp were both their swords that neither could ward off the other's blows. Rüdiger smote through Gernot's flint-like helmet, and the blood streamed forth from that warrior's head. Although mortally wounded, the stout Burgundian

uplifted the gift of Rüdiger with both hands, and cut the donor through shield and morion. At once Gotelind's lord died beneath that sword-stroke. They both dropped down together, Gernot and Rüdiger, each slain by the other's equal skill.

"Woe to this fatal day!" cried Hagen. "In these two leaders their friends have lost more than they will ever regain. Rüdiger's men must now meet their due."

Thereupon every man joined in the strife, and ere long not a single soul was living of the hosts of Bechlaren. King Gunther, Hagen, Dankwart and Volker then went and wept over the warriors Gernot and Rüdiger.

"Death despoils us fearfully," cried youthful Giselher. "But now cease weeping, and let us hasten into the open air to cool our harness. Methinks God will not grant us much longer life."

Many a knight might now be seen taking repose. All was hushed and still, and the ground was strewn with the dead. Meanwhile Kriemhild and King Etzel bore with them anxious hearts at hearing nothing from Rüdiger.

"Alas!" cried the queen, "Sir Rüdiger parleys too long with our enemies. He does wrong if, instead of avenging us on yonder murderous band, he guide them back again to Burgundy. Surely he has deceived me."

"That is false," thereto retorted Volker. "If I dare give the lie to so illustrious a dame, you have foully belied the margrave. He obeyed your mandates so faithfully that he and his retainers now lie slain within the hall."

The warrior's corpse was therewith brought and placed where both king and queen could see it well. No writer could ever find adequate words to describe the burst of lamentation that broke forth at this sight. King Etzel's grief was terrible. His voice resounded above all other wailing, like a lion's roar, and Kriemhild also wept immoderately over the good Rüdiger's body.

THIRTY-EIGHTH ADVENTURE.

HOW SIR DIETRICH'S MEN WERE ALL SLAIN.

THE cry of lamentation increased to such a pitch that tower and palace rang with the doleful sound. A knight of Bern heard it, and ran swiftly to bear the mournful tidings to his master Dietrich. "Such loud wailing," he said, "has spread among the people that surely either the king or dame Kriemhild must be dead."

"My faithful men," spake the host of Bern, seeing the excitement rife among his retainers, "be not over-hasty. Believe me, whatever evil has been wrought by these home-distant warriors arose through dire necessity. Let the compact I made with them now prove to their advantage."

Wolfhart hereupon declared his readiness to hasten to the hall and learn the full particulars of what had occurred, but Sir Dietrich, knowing well this knight's fiery, impetuous nature, and the gall that was now working within him, was unwilling to have the question asked by him. Instead, the lord of Bern sent his vassal Helfrich with orders to find out what had really happened to cause such exaggerated grief. Soon Helfrich returned, weeping bitterly.

"What news do you bring us?" cried Dietrich. "Why weep you so grievously, Helfrich, noble knight?"

"Alas!" exclaimed the champion, "yon Burgundians have slain faithful Rüdiger!"

"God forbid!" cried Dietrich; "that were revenge worthy the foul fiend himself! How hath Rüdiger merited such woeful return for his friendship?"

"If they have done this deed," spake bold Wolfhart, "their lives shall pay the forfeit. It would be to our dishonor should we tolerate such an outrage."

Sir Dietrich had seated himself beside a window to calmly take counsel within himself, for his heart was heavy and sorrow-laden. Finally, he bade master Hildebrand hasten to the guests and learn from their own lips what had occurred. Master Hildebrand was a well-approved warrior, and he boldly turned to obey this behest with neither shield nor sword in his hand, purposing to seek the guests in peaceful fashion. His sister's son, grim Wolfhart, saw this with angry discontent, and assured him that he must expect only insult from such a foe if he went unarmed. So the old and wise took counsel of the young and inexperienced; but ere the warrior could don his armor, all Dietrich's knights had flung on theirs in haste. Each fiercely shook his blade, and it troubled good Hildebrand sorely. He asked whither they were going, and when he found that they were bent upon accompanying him he could not but consent. So soon as Volker saw the Amelungen warriors advancing, sheathed in bright armor, uplifting their swords, he gave prompt notice to his liege lords. He had scarcely done speaking when Hildebrand drew near, set down his shield upon the ground, and thus addressed Gunther's band:

"Alas! ye good knights, what had Rüdiger done to you? My lord Dietrich sent me hither to learn whether it be really true, as some declare, that one of you has slain the noble margrave."

"The woeful news cannot be denied," said Hagen. "Would that it were false, for Rüdiger's sake!"

Then there arose a sobbing wail among the Amelungen knights, and one there was who declared that no greater sorrow could be his, did his own father lie dead before him. In a storm of passion, Wolfhart bewailed the loss that could never be repaired, and old Hildebrand sobbed out a request that Rüdiger's bloody corpse might be delivered unto him, in order that he and his friends could honor it with the last sacred rites. Thereupon King Gunther sneeringly professed great satisfaction that there were those who dare pay honor to the memory of one who well deserved it, saying that he considered no service so good as that which friend pays to friend.

"How long must we be kept waiting?" cried Wolfhart, proudly. "Since our choicest comfort has fallen by your hands, it behooves you to let us take him hence for burial."

"None there is who will bring him to you," retorted the fiddler, bold and brave. "Enter the hall and bear the body hence, whoever has the courage."

"Anger us not farther, thou fiddler!" exclaimed Wolfhart. "God knows you have done us ill enough already, and had not my lord forbidden strife, you would now be in a grievous plight."

"It is very well," mocked Volker, "to talk about being forbidden what we lack courage to do."

"Beware how you scoff at me," cried Wolfhart, "or I will so tune your strings that you will have something to talk about if ever you journey home to the Rhine."

"If you harm my strings," shrieked Volker, "I will sadly dim your helmet's lustre."

Thus they bandied words until Wolfhart could no longer restrain his fury. He made a movement to leap forward at the invincible fiddler, but his uncle Hildebrand held him back, begging him not to risk his lord's displeasure.

"Let loose the lion, master!" shouted Volker, "right savage is his mood; yet if he come near me, great though be his prowess, I will deal him such a stroke with my sword fiddle-bow that never more will he rage."

By this time Wolfhart's fury was kindled to its height, and holding aloft his shield, he sprang forward, like a wild lion, to the attack. A crowd of his friends followed his example. Swift as were the whole band of warriors, aged Hildebrand first reached the stairway. Straightway the master leaped upon Hagen, and soon there broke a fire-red blast from the clashing of their broadswords. The steady stream of fight, however, soon swept these two heroes asunder. Meanwhile sturdy Wolfhart had attacked Volker, and smote upon that hero's helmet with such force that the keen-edged sword reached the beaver. That stroke Volker repaid with a violence that sent Wolfhart reeling from him. Then they slashed at each other, making sparks fly from their

hauberks, until they were parted by a daring Amelungen knight.

Noble King Gunther met the renowned champions of Bern with a willing hand, and young Giseler made many a polished morion red with gore. The grim warrior Dankwart did battle so furiously that all his previous efforts seemed but as a puff of wind in comparison. On the other hand, Sir Dietrich's men gave evidence of how little it was their wont to spare themselves. Aged Hildebrand fought as though he were frantic, and many a good knight was overmastered by Wolfhart's stalwart hand. Duke Siegstab, Dietrich's nephew, fought as his courage moved him, and a bloody stream gushed forth wherever he plied his sword. When the valiant Volker espied this, he sprang furiously upon him, and felled him with one stroke. At once Sir Siegstab lost his life through that grim and dauntless fiddler.

"Ah, my dear lord!" cried master Hildebrand, in anguish, "Volker shall no longer go scathless after this."

Hereupon he smote at Volker with such a sure aim that a shower of splinters flew from buckler and from helmet. Thereby sturdy Volker came to his end. At this, Dietrich's men rushed on from every side, slashing from right to left, and snapping their sword-points in the fray. When Hagen found that Volker was dead, his bosom was rent with anguish beyond all that he had ever known. Vowing vengeance upon the slayer of his best comrade, he uplifted his shield and sprang forward. Just then, Helfrich slew Dankwart; but as the warrior panted his last breath, he returned the death-blow

his foeman had given. Gunther and Giselher were sorely grieved at their brave Dankwart's loss. Never had the Burgundian heroes fallen had not christians as well as heathens conspired against them. Unflinching Wolfhart thrice cut his way through the hall of carnage, slaying King Gunther's men by scores.

"Woe is me that ever I won so fierce a foe!" cried Giselher. "Dauntless knight, turn hither to me, I will end this, I can bear it no longer."

Thus defied, Wolfhart rushed at Giselher with fearful vehemence. Ute's fair son received the onset with many a rapid blow, and at last he smote Sir Dietrich's vassal through the good hauberk, so that the blood gushed out in torrents. Soon as fearless Wolfhart found that he was wounded to the death, he heaved his broadsword high in the air and smote Giselher through helmet and hauberk. They had given each other into grim death's embrace.

When Hildebrand saw Wolfhart fall, he threw his arms around the wounded man and strove to bear him from the house, but found him too heavy. Then the aged man wept bitterly. The dying warrior begged his uncle not to mourn for him, nor to permit his loving kinsmen to sorrow over his clay. He needed no lamenting, he said,—he had borne himself bravely in the fight, and died gloriously, by a king's son slain, whom he slew in return. After this, good Wolfhart closed his eyes in death.

At this moment, Hagen drew near master Hildebrand, and thinking how the old warrior had deprived him of the trusty Volker, he struck at him with the good sword Balmung. The stroke was re-

paid with one that proved a nobly wielded sword. Then Hagen gave a second blow that cut through his opponent's good hauberk, and Sir Dietrich's man, looking for worse if he remained, flung away his buckler and fled. Now not a man was living of all the Burgundian train, except Gunther and Hagen alone, while Dietrich's men all lay slain upon the ground.

Noble Dietrich sat alone, oppressed with anxious care. When he beheld Hildebrand, in his bloody harness, he shrinkingly asked him for tidings.

“How is this!” cried the lord of Bern. “Have you been fighting with the guests in yonder hall? If so, you have broken my commands.”

“This is Hagen's work,” responded Hildebrand. “He attacked me,—barely have I escaped with my life.”

“You have deserved this!” exclaimed Dietrich; “I promised friendship to the guests; right well you knew this, yet presumed to break troth with them.”

Then the aged warrior began to recount all that had taken place, giving full particulars of the cause of provocation. Dietrich wept grievous tears at hearing to a certainty that good Rüdiger was dead, slain by the hand of noble Gernot, and he vowed that he would himself join his warriors and question the Burgundian knights.

“Alas! I am your only warrior, the others are all dead,” spake master Hildebrand.

“If they have slaughtered all my liegemen,” cried the horrified Dietrich, “then am I indeed lost! But how is it that these bold guests, who must be

weary with long fighting, could overmaster my trusty band? Tell me, lives there yet one of those grim strangers?"

"There lives not one," rejoined master Hildebrand, "save Hagen of Tronje and King Gunther."

"Ah, woe is me, dear Wolfhart," wailed the lord of Bern; "since I have lost you, would that I had never been born! Who can help me back into the Amelungen land, now that my trusty followers are dead? Siegstab, Wolfwine and Wolfbrand are gone, and bold Helfrich, too, has met his doom. Ah, woe is me that no one can die of grief!"

THIRTY-NINTH ADVENTURE.

HOW GUNTHER, HAGEN AND KRIEMHILD WERE SLAIN.

DIETRICH sought out his own armor now, and Hildebrand assisted him to equip, and all the while the mighty man wailed so loudly that the house shook with the thunder of his voice. Yet soon he recovered his wonted heroic mood, and grasping his shield, he sallied forth with master Hildebrand. The knight of Tronje saw their approach, and cried :

“ Yonder comes Dietrich ; doubtless he will avenge his slaughtered liegemen. To-day all shall bear witness who can best wield a sword.”

These words were heard by Dietrich and Hildebrand, as they drew near the pair they were seeking. Sir Dietrich leaned his shield against the wall, and in tones of deep, impassioned anguish, thus began :

“ What have I done, King Gunther, that you should so cruelly wrong me? Was it not enough that good Rüdiger was slain by your people, without bereaving me as well of all my warriors? You see me now despoiled of all comfort, and you yourselves are bowed down with anguish at the loss of your own brave comrades.”

“ We are not so much to blame as you think,” rejoined Hagen. “ Your people advanced to this

house, armed for an attack. The true story has not been told you."

"How can I doubt my trusty Hildebrand's word?" exclaimed Dietrich. "He told me that my Amelungen knights demanded the corpse of Rüdiger, and that you returned them only taunts and jeers."

"They were denied their request," here interposed the landlord of the Rhine, "out of defiance to King Etzel, whereat Wolfhart grew infuriated, and thus the fight began."

"So be it then!" rejoined the champion of Bern. "Now, in the name of all your virtue, Gunther, noble king, give me such satisfaction as you may with honor, for the bitter anguish you have caused me. Yield up yourself and your valiant man, Hagen, to me, as hostages. Appear me thus; my woes shall then remain unavenged, and I will protect you against the Huns. You shall always find me steadfast and kind."

"God forbid!" thundered Hagen. "Never shall two well-tried knights, who yet stand unfettered in their good harness, undergo the shame of a surrender."

"You should not refuse me this," resumed Dietrich. "Gunther and Hagen, you have both so bitterly aggrieved me, and filled my heart with wailing and sorrow, that you owe me the amends I ask. I pledge you my word of honor that I will guide you in safety back to your home, or die with you."

"Demand no further," cried Hagen, once more. "Cowards indeed were we, did we yield ourselves to equal numbers, for I see no one with you but master Hildebrand."

“Nevertheless, you would do well to accept my lord’s offer,” said master Hildebrand. “Believe me, the hour is not far distant when you may be glad to accept it, and none will make it to you.”

“Ay, it were perchance better to accept it than to fly hence as you did,” retorted Hagen.

“What right have you to taunt me thus?” rejoined Hildebrand. “Pray, who was it that sat idly by upon his buckler that time when Walther of Spain slew so many of your friends? You will have enough to do if you look to your own shortcomings.”

“Shame, shame!” cried Dietrich. “Ill becomes it two such knights to bandy words like old women. I charge you to say no more, master Hildebrand. Now tell me, Sir Hagen,” the lord of Bern continued, “said you not, as I approached, that you were ready to match your strength with mine?”

“Far be it from me to deny it,” responded Hagen. “I am more ready now than ever to test the might of the Nibelungen sword, for you have roused my ire by making mention of surrender.”

With these words, grim Hagen flew down the stairs and rushed at his foeman. Noble Dietrich well knew how fierce a knight was now standing against him; so at first he merely warded off the tempestuous blows that were showered upon him from the sword Balmung. Watching his opportunity, however, he dealt a return stroke that cast his opponent, sorely wounded, to the ground. Very readily could Sir Dietrich have then put an end to the lord of Tronje, but, knowing how exhausted Hagen was with long fighting, he thought it would bring him little honor to do so. Instead, therefore, he seized Gunther’s vas-

sal in his powerful arms, and bore captive to dame Kriemhild's presence the boldest knight that ever wielded weapon. A fierce, savage joy flamed up in the heart of the once gentle queen, and she overwhelmed the lord of Bern with praise. She told him that he had requited her for all her long sorrow, and assured him that, if she lived, he should be richly rewarded. Dietrich implored her not to take the captive warrior's life, reminding her that he might some day make amends for his past transgressions. Without a word, King Etzel's queen had her enemy led away to a dungeon where none could behold him.

Meanwhile Gunther was shouting loudly for Dietrich, that he might be revenged upon him for Hagen's capture. Dietrich swiftly obeyed the call, and Gunther, seeing him approach, rushed forward from the hall to meet him. As they confronted each other, there arose a fearful din from the clashing of their swords; palace and turret resounded with the strokes. Well trained in combat as was Dietrich, Gunther fought so furiously against him that his escape was truly miraculous. Well indeed did King Gunther display his valor, yet finally the knight of Bern subdued him. The blood streamed forth from the warrior's harness, drawn by the fatal weapon that Sir Dietrich bore. Then the king was captured, as had been Hagen before, and carried in bonds into the presence of King Etzel's queen.

"You are welcome, King Gunther," cried she.

"I should thank you for your greeting, most noble sister," said Gunther, "did I think that good will prompted it; but well know I, from your fierce temper, queen, the derisive import of your words."

“Most royal dame,” then said the lord of Bern, “such noble knights have never been brought into bondage as those whom I have this day delivered into your hand. May these homeless ones have fair treatment, for my sake!”

Kriemhild replied that she would willingly grant them the treatment they deserved; whereupon, with tears streaming from his eyes, Dietrich went out from her presence, and then King Etzel’s frenzied queen wreaked a bloody vengeance on those indomitable champions who had been committed to her care. She had them imprisoned each in a separate cell, that they might have no chance of scheming together, and she determined that her dear lord Siegfried’s death should now be avenged. So soon as her brother was borne from her sight, she sought the dungeon where Hagen lay, and thus addressed the knight:

“Give me back what you have taken from me, and you may yet return alive to Burgundy.”

“Your demand is idle, high-born dame,” spake grim Hagen. “A solemn oath have I sworn never to reveal the treasure’s hiding-place so long as one of my lords remains alive.”

“I will put an end to this,” said Kriemhild.

Then the frantic woman sped away, ordered her sole remaining brother’s head to be cut off and brought to her, seized the bloody trophy by the hair and bore it herself into Hagen’s cell. For awhile the lord of Tronje viewed his master’s head with shuddering horror, then he thus addressed remorseless Kriemhild:

“Ay, you have ended this to your own pleasure,

precisely as I thought you would end it. Brave King Gunther now is dead,—young Giselher and Gernot, too, are gone; no one knoweth, now, where the hoard lies buried, save God and myself alone. Never shall you, foul fiend in woman's form, share the secret."

"Miserable, indeed, is the retribution I have gained," quoth she. "But Siegfried's sword shall at least be mine. My lord wore it when last these eyes beheld him in life. Woe passing all other hath since wrung my heart."

With these words, she sprang forward, drew the sword Balmung from its sheath at Hagen's side, grasping it firmly with both hands, swung it high in the air, and ere Hagen could recover from his consternation she had brought it down with one fell stroke which instantly severed from his body her hated enemy's head. King Etzel witnessed the hideous deed, and was filled with anguish and dismay.

"Alas!" ejaculated he, "that the hand of woman should slay the noblest knight that ever bore buckler in battle. His foeman though I was, I must needs sorrow over his fate."

"Little shall her deed profit her," spake master Hildebrand. "Great though be the grief this knight of Tronje has caused me, I shall avenge the brave hero's death."

Furiously the aged man sprang at Kriemhild, and cut at her with his mighty sword until he ended her poisoned existence. Her shrieks of terror availed her not, and she died tightly clasping the sword Balmung to her bosom. The ghastly corpses lay stretched around, and added to their numbers was now that

of the fair and once noble queen. Sir Dietrich and King Etzel wept and sadly bewailed the wretched fate of their friends and kinsfolk. The brave and the mighty were laid low, and King Etzel's gay high-tide had ended in woe, as so often in life it is the wont of pleasure to end.

Whoever would gain further knowledge of King Etzel and the weeping knights, esquires, dames and damsels of his realm, must seek it elsewhere, for at this point the ancient bard who is our authority tells his readers that his story is ended. This, says he, is the *Nibelungen Lay*.

